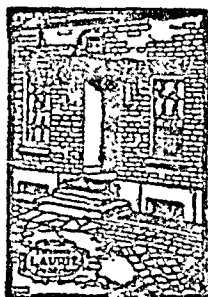


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MAURICE DEKOBRA

Author of
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TRANSLATED FROM
"MADAME JOLI-SUPPLICE,"
BY NEAL WAINWRIGHT

LONDON
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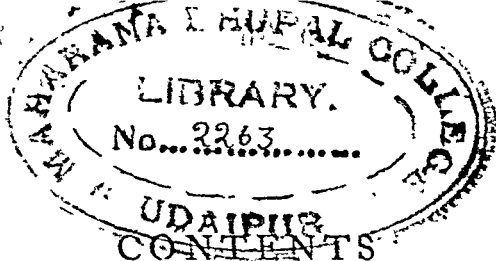
His books abound in sprightly witticisms, in graceful epigrams, in arresting simile, in metaphor culled from motoring. Their witchery is alluring, their mould is the craft of an efficient novelist, their realism is never gross, and their episodes never static, but always piquant. As expressions of an attitude to life they are effectively vacuous.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

ON BOARD THE "ARAMIS"

"PAULETTE, what does this character mean?"

"Tall."

"Right. And this one? A circle with a line drawn through it?"

"The middle."

"Right again. And this one? A roof with a woman underneath?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Oh, yes you have! It means *Peace*."

The young woman laughed delightedly:

"*Peace*?" You're joking, dear!"

"No I'm not, Paulette! In China, a woman under a roof signifies peace."

"All I can say is that Chinese women must have wonderfully sweet dispositions!"

"No better than any other women. It's symbolical, that's all. In the same way, three points mean a *mountain* and a pig under a roof means a *family*."

"The last, dear, is more than symbolical; it is the naked truth."

"And this circle with a point?"

"Isn't that the moon?"

"No. The sun."

"Of course! The moon is a crescent—I'll be

able to remember that by the crescents in the pastry shop on the rue de la Lune."

"How do we say: how are you?"

"Ning—er—er——?"

"Ning hao ma."

"How stupid I am!"

"And: how is your family?"

"Wait! I know that! *Fou shang hao ma!*"

"That's fine, Paulette. And what does *Orh ai ni* mean?"

"I love you——"

"And *I Lou bin an?*"

"*Bon voyage!*"

"Bravo!"

"Dear, it's seven o'clock. They'll be ringing for dinner in a minute."

The Chinese lesson was interrupted in the second class smoking-room on board the *Aramis*. Ho Chung and his wife Paulette went down to their cabin. The steamer, which had moved slowly out of Hong-Kong, was now putting on speed because it had reached the open sea. The young couple met Boulissier and Luciani on the stairs. These two athletic-looking young men were inspectors of the French police in Shanghai and were returning to duty after a leave of absence.

"Ah! Here are the honeymooners!" Boulissier cried gaily. "Been dreaming out on deck?"

"I should say not! My husband has been giving me my daily lesson. It is high time I learned to say 'Mamma' and 'Papa' in Chinese. We'll be there in three days."

"Courage, Madame Ho Chung!" said Luciani.

"I learned the Shanghai lingo ordering coolies around."

"But my wife is studying mandarin," Ho Chung remarked quietly. "That's still better."

"It won't help her much when she wants to bargain for a duck in the Chinese part of town. But, if she learns Cantonese, Yunnanese, the language of Fukien and half a dozen other dialects, she'll get on famously in China. See you after dinner."

The inspectors went out on deck, where they encountered a friend who had boarded the ship at Hong-Kong. He asked them :

"Who is the young Chinaman with the French girl ? "

Boulissier, leaning over the rail, replied :

"A white and yellow marriage." And, noticing that his friend seemed to have his doubts, he affirmed : "No, I'm not joking. They were married by the mayor of the 5th Arrondissement in Paris. I've seen their papers. He's twenty-four years old. Has his degree. Studied at *Centrale*. She was *née* Paulette Veyrron. She's the daughter of a widow who has a tobacco shop near the *Hotel des Cévennes* where he lived in the Latin Quarter. She used to sell him yellow *Marylands*. She fell in love with the Chinaman because he was polite and shy and respectful. He married her a month ago. And now they're on the way to his native land."

"You don't mean to tell me that that girl is going to live with him in China ? "

"I certainly do ! And why not ? Don't you

know that the wife should follow her husband to the banks of the Whangpoo ? ”

“ Poor little thing ! Has she any idea of what’s in store for her ? ”

“ That I can’t say ! I took jolly good care not to tell her, if that’s what you’re getting at. Why spoil a perfectly good honeymoon ? ”

“ Exactly who is this Ho Chung ? ”

“ Why, he’s the son of Ho Kung Li. You know as well as I do. One of the richest Chinamen in Shanghai. A good family with a complete set of ancestors and all the rest ! ”

“ Pedigrees don’t necessarily bring happiness.”

“ My dear chap, there’s no accounting for tastes ! If there are white girls who must have yellow men and Sons of Heaven who have a weakness for French *midinettes*, that’s their affair. For my part, I’d agree to stop the earth from turning before I’d try to stop a woman from satisfying a caprice. But dinner is served. Let’s go down. See you in the bar later. Perhaps we can have a rubber of bridge.”



The *Aramis*, like a phantom ship, glided through a sea of oil, in a halo of silver steam. The moon which shone above the rectangular funnels spread a dreamy fluorescence on the horizon. It was ten in the evening. Side by side in their deck chairs, Ho Chung and Paulette were contemplating the magic of this unreal night.

“ My little wife,” the Chinese said, pointing out into the night, “ do you see that junk with its big sails ? ”

"Yes. It reminds me of a fat beetle with its wings spread."

"Doesn't it! Perhaps it's going to fly away. We have an ancient poem that tells of lost junks, flying in the night above the clouds, around the China Sea——"

But the poetry of yesterday had far less charm for Paulette than the reality of to-morrow. She said:

"Listen, Loulou, you know I'm getting worried because you haven't received a wireless from your brother. We'll be landing in three days. Don't you think he should show some signs of life?"

Ho Chung feigned to ignore the note of criticism in his wife's remark. He was a respectful brother and he hastened to excuse the silence.

"My elder brother is an important personage, my little wife. He will think of us to-morrow or the day after. In any case, we'll see him when we disembark at Shanghai."

"Will he come for us in his automobile?"

"Perhaps. He has a marvellous American car."

"And will your younger brother be there, too?"

"Undoubtedly."

"In Paris, you seldom had any news from your big brother."

"It was not for him to write to me. It was my duty to write to him."

"And will your mother be at the boat, too?"

"Oh, no! In my country, women don't make a fuss about such trifles the way they do in France."

"Even after ten years' absence?"

"Paulette, material absence is of no importance.

Since I left my country, I have always been present in my mother's heart."

"And has she tiny feet like those you showed me in the pictures?"

"Yes, because my dear mother is already over fifty. When she was five, her feet were bound as was the custom then for all young girls of good family. Nowadays, it is not done."

"It was a horrid custom!"

"It was tradition, Paulette. Tradition is the voice of error echoing down the centuries. If that voice sounds false to us, it is because our ears have finally learned to recognise the truth when we hear it."

"And do you think your family will be glad to see me?"

"You will be received as one of them, Paulette."

"Hmm? I wonder. Somehow, they frighten me a little."

"But why? My country has changed tremendously in the last ten years. I left in 1923 and I'm happy to return to rejoice in the triumph of the noble ideas of our great Sun Yat Sen."

"Who?"

"Sun Yat Sen. Always remember that name, Paulette—Sun Yat Sen. You will see paintings and statues of him everywhere. He is the beloved apostle of all the young Chinese who desire to awaken that indolent monster that dozes placidly while the Occident knocks at the door. Unfortunately, since the Apostle's death, his teachings have been burlesqued. The politicians of the Kuo Ming Tang——"

"Of the what?"

"Of the Kuo Ming Tang. That means the Society of the Country of Brothers. Those politicians have abused the power which was left them by Sun Yat Sen, who overthrew the Manchu dynasty. And the result is that the Chinese who really love China can neither fraternise with Canton nor with Nankin."

He lowered his voice as if to confide a great secret and concluded:

"China must take the Red path if it is to be saved."

"Communism? Dearest! Are you a Bolshevik?"

"I am, my little wife. In France I never expressed my political opinions because I was the guest of your country. A guest does not break the bowl of rice one offers him—I am not speaking of material nourishment, but of mental food. Now that I have left France, I am at liberty to voice my convictions. If I am Red, it is because the future of my country lies in Communism."

"And your elder brother? Is he Red, too?"

"Surely not. He belongs to the ancient regime. He is very—*camelot du Roi* (royalist)! You understand?"

And the young Chinese smiled proudly for he was glad to be able to show his wife that he was intimate with the political vocabulary of the French Republic.

"Your brother is very rich, isn't he?"

"Very! But that would not prevent him from being Red if he were not primarily faithful to the Empire. I've told you that my honorable father

died three years ago. My family has just come out of mourning. The paternal authority has passed into the hands of my elder brother. My father was fifty-five. In 1907, one year before the death of the Emperor T'seu Hi and four years before the revolution, he belonged to the Forest of Pencils, which means that, a student, he had obtained the Kin jen degree and had been named mandarin, 'honourable, capable of advancing by himself.' Soon after that, he became Excellency of the fifth rank, with the crystal button, and he left the administration with the lapis-lazuli button of the fourth rank. Certainly, had it not been for the revolution, my father would have become Excellency with 'glorious renown' and the ruby button, and we would have inherited his title of nobility. But the tempest shook the throne of Peking——"

"But you'll admit you'd have liked the ruby button!"

"No! Really, no! My revered father made a great deal of money governing his fellow citizens. With the viceroys of the Empire and the prevaricating mandarins, they are all responsible for the revolution. As a respectful son, I deplore it for my father. As a Chinese of the Greater China, I do not regret their fall."

The conversation was interrupted by Inspector Boulissier, who tapped Ho Chung familiarly on the shoulder and said:

"Hello, *Mandarin curacao*! How about a little bridge?"

"No, thank you. My wife and I were just going down to our state-room."

"All right, old sport! Sleep tight and don't dream of Confucius. Good night, Madame."

As the inspector disappeared, Paulette turned to her husband.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to play cards with them, dear?"

After a short silence, Ho Chung said:

"I don't particularly like people who call me after a popular drink. I don't consider it very amusing. And one should never make light of Confucius. It's a proof of bad taste and ignorance all at once."

"I agree with you."

"All these fellows who are connected with the foreign Concessions have rather too much the habit of treating us like slaves or inferiors. And we have five thousand years of civilisation. It's ridiculous."

Ho Chung spoke quietly and slowly. But his fingers gripped the arms of the deck chair furiously. He mastered his indignation out of politeness. Lighting a cigarette, he concluded:

"*They*, the Europeans, the Barbarians. We still tolerate their extra-territoriality. But, before long, they will see. *They*, the Europeans, the Barbarians, came out of the West and installed themselves, by force of arms, on Chinese soil."

CHAPTER II

LIANG BRINGS A MESSAGE

ON the eve of the arrival in the estuary of the Yang Tse King, Paulette was busy packing. She had implored her husband to go up to the wireless room to make sure that no message had been received. When Ho Chung returned empty-handed, she could not conceal her disappointment and insisted:

"Did you spell your name for the wireless operators? And you're absolutely certain they have nothing for you?"

"Nothing, my little wife. Nothing at all——"

"But—— How do you account for it?"

"I don't—— I can't imagine——"

Ho Chung sat down on the edge of the bed. He wore his hair close-cropped so that it bristled, and although, like most Southern Chinese, he was short, he gave the impression of being well-proportioned. His face was attractive. His black eyes, not exaggeratedly oblique, illumined his yellow complexion, and he had to be thoroughly angry before their calm expression was disturbed by a dark fire. He belonged to one of the best Chinese families, possessed of innumerable ancestors. His was a proud family in which self-control was considered as a cardinal virtue and, better still, as an evidence of perfect education.

He puffed contentedly on his cigarette while he watched his wife arranging her underthings in a valise. But he frowned slightly. He was perplexed. It was not because he had received no word from his elder brother, but because he was not as yet decided as to how to explain the situation to his bride. He knew that she would continue to question him and he could not make up his mind whether or not to tell her the truth.

Paulette broke the silence. Her arms full of stockings and pyjamas, she stopped directly in front of him and asked pointedly :

"Doesn't this lack of news surprise you ? "

Quietly he answered :

"No——"

"No ? What do you mean ? "

"Well, frankly, I don't expect to find my brother waiting on the dock of the *Messageries Maritimes*."

"But why not ? Is he ill ? "

"He is not ill, thanks be to Heaven. But—— But——"

Paulette was intrigued by Ho Chung's evident embarrassment. She repeated :

"But—— But what ? "

"Paulette, I suppose that the best thing is to tell you the fact : my elder brother disapproves of our marriage. That is, he—— Well, he——"

"What ? Why ? Is it because I am not so rich as he is ? Is it because my mother works ? "

"No ! No, not that ! You know my opinions perfectly. No one should be ashamed of working for a living."

"Yes—— But your brother ? "

" Well—— You see, my brother's ideas are not so modern as mine. In Shanghai, there are any number of Chinese progressives who live almost exactly like the Europeans. But my brother is not one of them. It is only fair to you to tell you that he has not changed as I have with the times, and that he would have preferred another marriage."

Paulette let her silken bundle drop on to the bed. She was worried now and she wanted more details. She asked :

" Another marriage ? What other marriage ? "

" Well, he would have liked it better if I had married my fiancée."

" What ? You are engaged ? And you've always been engaged ? And you've never breathed a word of it to me ? "

" I *was* engaged. Let me explain, Paulette. In my country it is the custom for the fathers to select their son's future wives at a very early age. When I was still living in China, when I was ten to be exact, my father arranged for my marriage with the daughter of one of his best and oldest friends. She is a Chang, of the very noble family of Chang Ching Lo of Hangchow. Her first name is Precious Jade. I have never seen her. When I decided to marry you three months ago, I wrote to my elder brother. He expressed his disapproval. I wrote him a second time to try to convince him that the European custom was far better than our absurd method and that every man was entitled to choose for himself, and regardless of restrictions, the woman who was to become the partner and the companion of his life. My brother did not reply on that point. Then,

as you know, I decided to return to China. With my qualifications as a French engineer, I am sure of finding a good position right away. My brother has many very influential friends and he will help me. Because this misunderstanding cannot last for long. In the meantime, it accounts for his silence."

Paulette's effort to conceal the astonishment occasioned by her husband's revelations was a complete failure. She exclaimed :

" You were engaged to a Chinese girl ! "

" Yes. A very young Chinese girl whom I have never seen in my life. She must be about nineteen now."

" Nineteen ! She'll try to get you back and she'll threaten me, likely as not ! "

" Paulette, that's amusing ! If you understood anything about our customs, you would know that the daughter of a good family, raised with respect for ancient traditions, has nothing in common with the emancipated European girls who play with revolvers and vitriol. My ex-fiancée has, no doubt, been informed of my marriage to you and, never having even seen me, her heart cannot be broken."

Paulette sighed. After all, her husband's argument was reasonable. She was convinced. Nevertheless, the hostility of her powerful brother-in-law continued to upset her. She allowed Ho Chung to take her hand which he held very tenderly in both of his. Little by little, her fears departed.

" Don't you worry, my little wife," he told her.

" Everything will be all right once we get there——"

He gazed at her lovingly. Because he really did

"There is no word for kiss in Chinese. We do not kiss; we sniff."

"Oh! How amusing!"

"We do like this, Mademoiselle Paulette——"

They sniffed to begin with, but their lips soon met. The young student, living in France, was not a stranger to the ways of Occidental love. Their mutual desire took flame in the fire of their flirtation. Paulette knew that she would not resist. It all happened suddenly. The light was out, but from the street a yellow glow penetrated the shutters and fell on a coloured print of Sun Yat Sen, thumb-tacked to the wall above the bed.

Paulette escaped at one in the morning. Her adventure with a man of another race left her quite bewildered.

The next day, in the tobacco shop, she feverishly passed out packages of cigarettes. Her eyes were very bright. Her voice was full of assurance. She seemed on the point of announcing to the ladies of the quarter who came for stamps or snuff or papers: "You, you're married to a seedy shopkeeper or a stupid government employée; you have lovers turned out by the dozen and every one the same; you don't exist for me. I am the mistress of the son of a great Chinese mandarin. I am the little friend of a man who comes from that wonderful country where the women have mutilated feet and he can write a language you can't read and he is teaching me to eat fried potatoes with ivory and silver chopsticks."

The liaison lasted for a year. Ho Chung graduated and was a full-fledged engineer. He decided to go

home to China and, because he loved Paulette, he deliberately sought out her mother one day at an hour when he knew his mistress would be absent. The widow Veyrron, timid and defenceless, received this well-bred Chinese, who bowed low before her and begged for the favour of an immediate interview. His request for her daughter's hand in marriage was comparable to the explosion of a bomb in the middle of her cigarettes. Paulette the wife of a yellow man! Paulette carried off by an Asiatic pagan who had not even partaken of his first Communion. A week later, she gave in, vanquished by the entreaties of her daughter, who was already excited at the thought of the departure.

China! What havoc this simple word can set loose in the imagination of people who have never been beyond Chantilly or Versailles! For three whole weeks, Madame Veyrron's neighbours, between the Luxembourg and the rue Gay-Lussac, Bullier and the rue Soufflot, all shopkeepers of the quarter, discussed nothing but this astonishing event.

"Have you heard that little Paulette, the one in the tobacco shop on the rue de l'Abbé de l'Épée, is going to China?"

"What! Are you crazy?"

"She's going to marry a mandarin. You know, the son of a Chinese millionaire with thirty wives and a pigtail and finger-nails as long as your arm and a palace at Saïgon."

"But, Madame Trussol, I always thought Saïgon was in Indo-China."

"So did I. But it sounds like that, anyway."

They say it's between Tokio and Australia. The end of the world, wherever it is ! "

" And she's going to marry a Chinaman ! That girl has lost her mind ! "

" She's in love with him. And he's in love with her. Why, he's given her the prettiest green necklace you'd ever want to lay your eyes on, and a dress all embroidered with a collar as high as this ! "

" Hmm ? Yellow ? "

" The collar ? "

" No. The Chinaman. "

" Of course he is. Yellow as can be. But I don't think he's really bad. Anyway, he has diplomas from *l'Ecole Centrale* ! "

" Marry a yellow man ! Hmm ? Well, it's true that Léonie, the daughter of the café on the rue Monsieur, almost ran off with a black man last year ! "

" *Mon dieu !* A black man ? "

" Yes, Madame Trussol. Not even yellow ; black, I tell you ! They say he plays the drum in the jazz orchestra at the *Coupoie*. I tell you, women nowadays just don't pay any attention to colour. "

" All I have to say is, Madame Crin, that we were more particular when I was young. Why, I could have made a rich marriage, but I wouldn't hear of it because he was always breaking out in a rash in hot weather. What are we coming to ! "

* *

Ho Chung's optimism was not entirely unjustified. True enough, if he was returning to the fold, it was principally because his elder brother had cut off his allowance and there was little else left for him to do. But he by no means despaired of getting

back into the good graces of his family. He distinctly remembered that when, at the age of fourteen, he had been at the French school in Shanghai, his father had manifested an evident preference in his regard. He had even gone so far as to tell his elder brother to take particular care of him in the case that he should die prematurely. There were four Ho children: Ho Chung, his elder brother who was thirty, his younger brother, who was already married, and a sister, the youngest of them all, also married to an important functionary, the secretary of the legislative Yuan at Nankin, an opportunist who, having watched to see how the wind would blow, had harnessed himself to the star of Chang Kai Tchek.

Ho Ta Wen, the elder brother, did not work. Lazy, fat, something of a lunatic, he was satisfied with being the chief heir and the head of the family. He squandered dollars at fantan at the races, at the game of thirty-six animals and on provincial lotteries. It was a colossal effort for him to consult a fortune-teller as to the chances of number 34, series Z, or to study with attention the performances of the best fighting grasshoppers of Chekiang. He was a gambler and a good-for-nothing.

* *

The pretty white hull of the *Aramis* glided through the muddy water of the Whangpoo. Ho Chung, standing motionless on the upper deck, was gazing with emotion at the shores of old China on which he had not set foot for ten years. Although he claimed to have freed himself from all the bonds of tradition and race prejudice and was an ardent

sympathiser with the Third International, the sight of the land of his ancestors made it impossible for him to control the impatient pounding of his heart. For a few moments, he quite forgot the harangues at the Communist meetings and that he had cried as loudly as his comrades: "Down with the frontiers! No more native lands! Burn the flags!" He forgot his red catechism to tremble as his eye detected on the horizon the superimposed roofs of a pagoda, standing out in the morning mist.

Memories of his early youth assailed his bounding heart. Those coolies walking barefooted on the yellowish soil, those sampans slipping through the water, those red oriflammes with their big familiar signs, those policemen in black uniforms with white bands around their caps, those lumbermen panting on the pontoons, those tall houses of the Bund already visible beneath the first rays of the rising sun—all those sights reminded him of his childhood and of his dreams of a young emancipated Chinese, impatient to conquer the world.

Paulette came running to ask:

"Where are we, dear? Tell me! Will we be there soon?"

"Almost there, dear—less than an hour now. Those tall buildings you see over there are a part of the Bund—and that's Shanghai——"

"But. It makes me think of New York. Those skyscrapers we saw in the movies——"

"Naturally. And it's almost the same thing because you're looking at the International Concession. Beyond it, you can see the French Concession——"

"No! Has France a colony out here?"

"No! Never!" Ho Chung's protest was vigorous. "France has no colony in China but a Concession. Eighty years ago, we gave the Europeans permission to settle here. And, of course, they've done everything they wanted—they've changed the skyline—now you see a modern city. That's all right, but, one day, we'll get it back from them—because, Paulette, China belongs to us—to the Chinese!"

"Listen, dear, I put our passports in your overcoat pocket. Do you think we'll have any trouble landing?"

"None at all. The customs officers are Chinese, and you'll see how they welcome a son of Ho Kung Li!"

* * *

It was exactly eight o'clock in the morning when the *Aramis* docked. The ceremony which accompanied the inspection of the passports was quickly over. Ho Chung looked expectantly in all directions.

"And you don't see your brother, anywhere?" Paulette asked him.

"No. I don't see him——"

"But. Your younger brother? Is he there?"

"Not a soul in sight. Wait! Yes! There's old Liang! Good old boy! He's only a servant, but he sort of runs the family. In France, you'd call him a major-domo——"

"A what?"

"A major-domo! You know—a butler who presses clothes and does everything and dies in the family."

" And why has he come ? "

" To represent my family ! "

Ho Chung made excited signs to Liang, who cried out in Chinese that he had a message for him. Paulette's nerves had stood about all they could and this delay only served to upset her more than ever. She ran after her husband to deck C, where they were almost knocked over by a turbulent throng of porters, coolies and visitors. These invaders quickly took possession of every part of the ship as if they had been a swarm of ants. They respected nothing !

Finally, Liang made his way through the crowd. He was out of breath and he showed signs of being too well-fed. Nevertheless, he remembered to be respectful to the second son of his master and he bowed low before he handed him a white envelope with a blood-red border in the middle of which fat signs were designed in black ink. Ho Chung took it, opened it and read the contents.

Paulette, unable to contain her excitement, cried :

" Dear ! Tell me. Is it from your brother ? "

" Yes."

Ho Chung slowly folded the letter, gave the baggage checks to Liang and turned to his wife. He was obviously uncomfortable, as he admitted.

" My brother tells me that it is impossible for him to receive us in his home and begs me to come to see him when he can see me. It doesn't matter. We can go to a Chinese hotel called the *Great Eastern* for a night or two. After that, we'll see——"

" But ? Is he still angry ? "

"Yes, I'm afraid so. But don't you worry, dearest!"

They were disturbed by a steward, who came to say that two Chinese were waiting for Ho Chung at the door of his state-room. Ho Chung studied their visiting cards and replied quickly:

"Very well—I'll see them."

Turning to Paulette, he explained in an undertone:

"Wait for me in the smoking-room. I'll only be gone a quarter of an hour."

"What is it? Relatives?"

"No. Friends!"

With that, Ho Chung rushed down to his cabin. In the corridor outside, two Chinese, one in European clothes and the other in a black robe but wearing a grey felt hat, were pacing back and forth. The man in the European suit whispered:

"Comrade Teng Fah sent us——"

"The Chief of the Chinese Communist Secret Police?"

"Yes. We've come for the message our French comrades entrusted to you."

"Very well. Do me the honour of entering my very modest cabin. At least, once inside, with the door closed, we can speak freely."

The two Communists did not ask for a second invitation and, while Ho Chung was closing the door, the comrade with the grey felt hat remarked:

"A good idea! One can never be too careful. Between the police of the International Concession and the people from Nankin, one never knows where one is!"

CHAPTER III

A CHINESE FAMILY OF IMPORTANCE

PAULETTE was sitting in her room at the *Great Eastern*. Her husband was downstairs instructing the coolies about the baggage.

Alone, in a Chinese hotel, frequented exclusively by yellow people, she was anything but comfortable. There was that slippered waiter who had come into the room without knocking to serve two cups of tea and who had looked at her with vulgar curiosity ; there were those guttural exclamations in the corridor ; there were those unreadable notices posted beside the door ; there was that flat bed with two pillows fit for dolls ; there was that great gaping spittoon beside the table. It was all very strange and it was far from homey.

Nevertheless, the trip across Shanghai in the ricksha had somewhat reassured her. She had seen many white people who lived just as they did in France and well-disciplined policemen, and women who dressed in Parisian style. This had given her some hope that she would not feel too lost and homesick. She had only realised that she was in China when she had entered this hotel, which seemed to be crowded with noisy, squabbling, agitated people.

After an eternity, her husband appeared, followed by barefooted coolies with faces like hangmen.

Paulette was frightened when they clustered about Ho Chung and all jibbered at once in a demand for a bigger tip. She was sure they were going to murder him and then her. Instead, her husband pushed them brutally out of the room, swore at them in forceful language and slammed the door. Suddenly, Paulette burst into tears and threw herself into his arms. Gently, he stroked her tired head and consoled her :

" You are nervous, dear. Rest yourself. There is nothing to worry about. We'll stay here until my brother accords me an interview."

" Will you tell me now who those men were who came to find you on the boat ? "

" Two Chinese Communist delegates. The party had been advised by our French comrades that I would bring them a message of sympathy addressed to Mo Ye Tung, the president of our central executive committee."

" But—do you intend to be active in politics here ? "

" That depends entirely on developments. If I can be of any service to them, they will let me know."

" And what about your elder brother ? "

" I gave Liang a message for him. I am waiting for the answer."

It was only on the morning of the second day that the arrival of Liang relieved the impatience of the young couple. It appeared that Ho Chung was expected at noon in the family house. He departed immediately with the old servant who had come to the hotel in his master's car. Having turned into

the Avenue Joffre and arrived at the extreme limit of the French Concession, they stopped in Chinese territory, not far from the cemetery of Hung Jao, outside a sort of walled park, in the middle of which there stood the principal house with its dependencies and its pavilions where a quantity of people could be lodged.

Two blond men in black uniforms, with revolvers at their belts, closed the gates immediately they had entered. Ho Chung asked Liang, in some astonishment, as he got out of the car :

" Who are those men ? "

" They belong to the guard of the Elder Master. They are eight in all and they are on duty day and night—Russians from Kharbin."

" But what for ? "

" Because the Master has been threatened by kidnappers. It's cheaper to pay a few dollars a month to those guards than to give 100,000 silver taels to the bandits."

Ho Chung entered the house where his brother had reigned supreme since the death of their father. A servant in white with a peacock-blue vest ushered him into a salon, half-European and half-Chinese, where furniture made from the black wood of Canton was distributed among little tables and fat leather armchairs. Ho Chung waited five minutes. When finally the servant returned, Ho Chung, annoyed, asked :

" Where is my elder brother ? Has he been informed of my arrival ? "

" The Master is with the whole family."

" Well, then, what are you waiting for ? "

A gong sounded. The servant bowed and invited Ho Chung to follow him.

He went into the library and found himself in the presence of his elder brother, his younger brother, his mother and his sister. He greeted each of them ceremoniously, as he had been taught to do in his youth, and it was only with his mother that his embrace was markedly more affectionate. Judging by the attitude of the family, the prodigal's return was anything but an occasion for celebrating. Each one had pronounced the prescribed words: "*Chia ho fu tzu sheng*" (happiness belongs to united relatives). But this was nothing more or less than the purest formality.

Domestics brought trays of tea—the delicious Hangchow tea perfumed with jasmine—and proceeded to serve a light repast consisting of five courses: the white meat of chicken seasoned with chestnuts, *lichis*, shrimps with bamboo shoots, a mandarin fish with sugar and vinegar and a lacquered baby pig. Last of all, came the proverbial rice in pale blue bowls.

Very respectfully, Ho Chung picked up bits of meat with his ivory chopsticks and offered them to his elder brother and his mother in turn, while, with like politeness, the elder brother asked him about his sojourn in France. Paulette was not mentioned.

Ho Chung knew very well that this peaceful meal was nothing but the calm before the storm. He asked his sister, whose first name was Supreme-Good-Luck, about her husband, and Madame Supreme-Good-Luck informed him that he had gone

to Nankin in response to an urgent request from Wang Ching Wei, the president of the Yuan Executive. Of his elder brother, he inquired for the health of his wife, Madame Pearl-of-the-Dragon, who was visiting the ancestor at Hangchow, where he lived with his wives in the ancient seat of the family. Ho Chung further interested himself in how his elder brother's gambling was getting on. The head of the family deigned to explain that he had recently won fifteen hundred dollars at the races, only to lose twice the amount at fantan, in the clandestine dive of a certain Chen, who moved four times with each moon to dodge the detectives from the Concessions. He also questioned his younger brother, who was twenty and had obediently married, the preceding autumn, Miss Beautiful-Bright-Day, a pretty young thing from Souchow, selected by the elder brother. She was not at the luncheon because she was expecting a baby. It was bound to be a boy from what the fortune-tellers had predicted.

It was not a brilliant party. Everyone made an effort to keep the conversation going, but heavy silences fell over the gathering every few minutes.

Ho Chung contemplated the familiar decorations on the walls. He saw, of course, the portrait of the ancestor, the grandfather, who, a forgotten phantom, hid himself in that huge house on the banks of the lake at Hangchow, not very far away from the pagoda dedicated to the memory of the famous General Yo Fei. The ancestor stood out in colours on the enlarged photograph in all the splendour

of his seventy-six years, with his face of old ivory, his white beard and his falling moustaches.

He was as imposing as a relic in the *Palais d'Hiver*. On either side of him there hung rolls of Chinese paper on which the ancestor, a very learned gentleman, had inscribed a short poem which, translated word for word, meant :

When
the rumor
resounds
all things
become
quiet.

When
the company
hushes
the stars
become
rare.

Ho Chung's elder brother stood up. And, just as the shot of a gun scatters the birds, so did he, with a vigorous belch, disperse the ladies, who scampered off with quick short steps.

Ho Chung found himself alone with Ho Ta Wen, his elder brother, and Ho Ju Lin, his younger brother. He resembled the accused in the presence of his judges. It was for the elder brother to speak while the younger brother, lounging in an armchair, sipped his tea and chewed dried melon seeds. He apparently was not interested in the matter at hand. Besides, he was impatient to rejoin his wife and be told that he was the father of a son.

The elder brother was an obese Chinese, very little inclined to become modern. He read English with difficulty and wore European clothes but rarely. Faithful to the code of old China, respectful of traditions, he lived shut up in his park under the diligent surveillance of the Russian exiles whom he

paid to protect his precious person. He ate too much and believed profoundly in the countless superstitions of his race.

When he had terminated the long speech in which he elaborated on his fraternal affection and the sacrifices he had made to give Ho Chung an Occidental education, the latter spoke in his turn :

"Permit me, very humbly, great elder brother, to thank you once again for your inestimable kindness in my regard. Your rare wisdom has dictated to you words of justice and I would lack the audacity to question them. But all this brings us to my marriage. I have married a Frenchwoman. You disapprove."

"I disapprove. My wife disapproves. Our mother disapproves. The ancestor disapproves. We were all of us prostrated with disapproval when we learned of your deplorable decision. Your younger brother——"

"Had Brother-Three espoused a Manchurian or a Tibetan girl, I would have refrained from all criticism. He is free. I am free. We are all free."

"No. We are not free. We have a long line of ancestors of honour which cannot be questioned. All of them married women of our race and never, in this family, has there been a *métalliance*. Permit me to state that our defunct and revered father, like our grandfather, would never have accepted the daughter of a barbarian in our midst."

"The Frenchwoman whom I chose in Paris is worthy of sharing our rice."

"Our father did not designate her for you. On the contrary, he chose for you a perfect fiancée,

virtuous, chaste and with a heart of purest jade. You should never have forgotten her."

"But I love my wife. I don't even know my fiancée!"

The elder brother cleared his throat and bombarded the bronze spittoon with perfect accuracy. Then, with a melon seed between his teeth, he cried disgustedly:

"How is it possible to love a white woman! For one night perhaps to make sure that her skin is pale all over! And even that would be too much!"

Ho Chung's eyes gleamed between his narrowed lids. His hands grasped his knees and he exclaimed:

"Ta Ko (Great Elder Brother), I cannot permit you to insult white women. They have as many charms and virtues as have our women."

"Pooh!" Brother-Three interrupted, still stretched out in the armchair. "I tried one in the French Concession on the rue Sœur Allegre. Pooh! Pooh, I say! Not so marvellous as all that!"

Ho Chung had risen brusquely to his feet. His anger was too much for him:

"You presume to compare——"

The elder brother calmed Ho Chung with a wave of his hand. The younger brother stood up. With a bored air, he said:

"Anyway, this is none of my affair and it fails to interest me. I don't care if you take it into your head to have concubines of all the colours in the rainbow——"

He bowed to his elder brother and to Ho Chung. Then he disappeared with a rustle of silk.

"Brother-Three is wrong to talk that way," declared the elder brother as he lit a cigarette. Virginian tobacco was one of the few things produced by those foreign devils which met with his high favour. "The only course left open to you is to rectify as soon as possible the error you made by marrying abroad against the wishes of our father, and regardless of the arrangements he and the family of your fiancée had made for you."

"Rectify the error? But, what do you mean?"

"Hear me carefully. Since you sailed from France, I have reflected deeply on the matter. Everything can be arranged satisfactorily if you will listen to reason."

"Well?"

"Let me explain: to begin with, your marriage with that woman in France does not exist in our eyes. For us, as well as for the family of Precious Jade, you are still a bachelor. Therefore, I have decided——"

A servant appeared. Ho Ta Wen asked:

"Well?"

The domestic whispered to his master:

"Madame Lovely-Torture has expressed a desire to see the Master Ho Chung, for she has only just been informed of his arrival in the house."

"Very well. Tell her that she can meet him at once if she will come here."

Ho Chung had pricked up his ears. When he had left for Europe, the servants had confided to him that, the doctors having affirmed that his brother could never have any children by Madame Number One, it had been determined to procure

him a concubine who would give him a son. At the advice of a lady of Nankin, whose business it was to decorate the boudoirs of the high dignitaries of the Nationalist Government, he had purchased a certain Miss Siao Pao Pao, better known as Madame Lovely-Torture, because she was a coquette possessed of an art which only the devil himself could have taught her. She had made a successful theatrical debut by the side of Miss The-Snow-and-the-Guitar, already in vogue with the prophets of the Kuo Ming Tang. Madame Lovely-Torture had cost Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, 12,000 dollars, not to speak of a 250 dollar commission for the lady of Nankin who had guaranteed above her signature the intelligence, the refinement, the charm and—the virginity of this pearl.

Beyond the slightest doubt, Madame Number Two deserved the title of Lovely-Torture for, in less than six months, she had won the heart and the senses of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. With an instinctive facility for seduction, she refused herself, she yielded, she refused again and thus kept her amorous partner in a perpetual state of uncertainty, which only accentuated the delight he experienced when she suddenly and unaccountably swooned beneath his caresses. At the end of a year, she had completely ousted Madame Number One and reigned as the accepted mistress in the big house in Shanghai. Either out of malice or cowardice, everyone obeyed her, even to the younger brother, a complete dolt, who, having weighed the advantages and disadvantages, had preferred the favourite's smile to her frown.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, in corresponding with his brother in France, had never mentioned Madame Lovely-Torture, with the consequence that Ho Chang had remained in ignorance of the fact that her word was law in his ancestral home. Liang had but lately described her power in these terms:

"You will find, beneath the master's roof, a new and occult force. We all of us submit to it. The wind which pushes the clouds is invisible and, nevertheless, the clouds obey."

* * *

Ho Chung questioned his brother:

"May I ask who desires to make my acquaintance?"

"My second wife, Brother Two. She has never set eyes on you. It is only natural that she should want to know you, the more particularly as we have discussed you at great length these last three months."

"And does she also object to my marriage?"

Ho Ta Wen eluded this question and went on:

"She is a woman of unusual talent, intelligence and experience. She paints pretty fans for me and she knows excellent remedies. She cured me of a serious malady with a powder made from dragons' teeth—Brother-Two! Kindly do not smile! We Chinese have more knowledge of medical science than all your European doctors put together. She also cured me of nightmare by making me write with my middle finger on the palm of my left hand these words: 'I am a devil!' And, since that day, the evil dreams have been afraid to disturb me in my sleep."

Ho Chung wanted badly to laugh but, instead, he maintained a respectful attitude. Besides, the eulogy of Madame Number Two was interrupted by a delicate white hand which drew aside the curtain. Ho Chung had already heard soft slippers tripping lightly over the floor. He turned. Madame Lovely-Torture appeared.

CHAPTER IV

YOUR GOLD CONCERNS YOU MORE THAN MY HAPPINESS

MADAME LOVELY-TORTURE'S beauty was, from the Chinese point of view, above all criticism. Her head had the shape of a perfect bird's egg. Her glossy black hair, treated with scented ointments and adorned with a jade comb and her artfully cut fringe across her forehead contrasted charmingly with the tea-rose tint of her carefully massaged skin. Her nose was small and slightly convex and her nostrils were as delicate as camellia petals. Her black eyes, not excessively oblique, were capable of being gentle, delightfully tender or of flashing fire under the impulse of well-calculated wrath. And the anger of Madame Lovely-Torture was to be reckoned with for she would not have stopped at murder to avenge herself on an enemy.

She had no more than entered the room than she bowed to her master and to her brother-in-law, whom she proceeded to study with a curiosity in which it was difficult to say whether there was sympathy or antipathy. Ho Ta Wen, summing up the situation, concluded :

"As you see, Sweet-Flower, my brother has forgotten in Europe all that his Chinese education had taught him."

Madame Lovely-Torture, who spoke the mandarin language perfectly—she had studied dramatic art in Peking with Shang Hsiao Yun, a disciple of the famous Mei Lang Fang—replied suavely :

“ Even to forgetting the project which his beloved father, with his wealth of wisdom, had formulated for him.”

“ But, as I was explaining to him when you joined us, his error is not irreparable because his union with that foreigner is of no importance in our eyes. Now, this is what I have decided—give me all your attention, Brother-Two. You have returned to the land of your ancestors because I stopped the allowance I had been giving you in Europe, in accord with our revered father's last wishes. But I do not seek to deprive you of my financial assistance. If you will promise to marry Miss Precious Jade within a reasonable length of time, you will be immediately welcome in the family circle.”

Ho Chung was silent for an instant or two. His brother's stubborn determination to force this Precious Jade upon him was beginning to arouse his suspicions. Desirous of knowing all the truth, he asked :

“ And why are you so anxious that I should accept this fiancée ? ”

“ Because such was the wish of our father who, fourteen years ago, decided that this union should take place.”

“ Perfectly, but the disappearance of our dear father from our midst has brought an end to that arrangement.”

"The honour of the family demands——"

"One moment—I feel certain that, aside from the honour of the family, you have a further reason for seeking to force this marriage."

"Well, since you must know, the father of Precious Jade is associated with me in commercial transactions of vast importance. Thanks to him, I make a great deal of money and, naturally, I wish to avoid him the embarrassment of accepting a rupture which could not but stain the life of his daughter."

"I imagined as much. The truth is that your gold concerns you more than my happiness!"

"Brother-Two, I implore you! It is, above everything, a case of properly respecting the desire of the beloved dead. Marry Precious Jade and we will receive you with open arms."

"And my wife?" Ho Chung's exasperation was too much.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, waved his fan as if to dismiss the existence of such a person. It was clear that it mattered little to him what became of this unknown Frenchwoman. But the younger man insisted:

"Do you imagine for a minute that I will repudiate the wife of my choice, the woman whom I love?"

Madame Lovely-Torture was standing behind the massive chair where Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was seated. She had instinctively adopted this fitting pose. Ruling over the household as she did with no official authority to do so, she affected modesty, the better to control. It was she who replied very sweetly to Ho Chung:

"You will pardon me if I intervene in a matter which does not concern me, but your honourable elder brother does not ask you to repudiate your wife." She bent over her lord and murmured: "Am I not right, well-beloved? Did we not decide the other day that Ho Chung could come here to live with his—with that—with that person from Europe? When he is really married to Miss Precious Jade, the foreign woman will become a sort of Madame Number-Two, provided that Miss Precious Jade, as I hope, will deign to tolerate her presence in her shadow."

Ho Chung sprang to his feet. The words of Madame Lovely-Torture had wounded both his love and his pride. He said:

"I thank you both for your very noble offer. But I do not accept it and I ask you to permit me to leave at once."

"You are making a mistake, Brother-Two. If you desert us in this fashion, you must depend on your own devices for your rice, and for that of your children when they arrive."

"I could sue you for my legitimate share of our father's fortune, but I know that, with your money, you could buy all the judges. I prefer a hundred times to live poorly on my own resources than to be insulted under your roof or to accept a single copper from you."

"Proud words those—and—hasty. Life is hard for young men in your position. Shanghai and Hong-Kong are crowded with very well educated men who want work."

"You don't frighten me."

Madame Lovely-Torture was extremely amiable as she said :

" This is most regrettable, for it was I who suggested that solution of the problem to your honourable elder brother——"

" I thank you, Madame. Never will my wife be the servant of one of the Chang Ching Lo ladies."

Ho Ta Wen did not neglect his turn to put in a word :

" Brother-Two, it is deplorably clear that your mind has been poisoned in foreign lands—I really believe that you are at the point where you scoff at the Three Principles and the Five Orders. I have even heard a rumour that your sympathies are with the Reds. Imagine it ! With the enemies of Old China ! "

" The rumour is correct. I confirm it. They will save our country."

" You mean, perhaps, that they will lead it to its doom."

" No. The Manchu Emperors have done all the harm to China. Bolshevism means safety by unity."

" Yours is not sound reasoning, and I suggest that you preach your doctrines elsewhere."

" That is precisely what I intend to do. Good-bye."

Ho Chung bowed and departed.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, sighed deeply. More than ever, he considered his brother as a lost soul, as the unhappy victim of the pernicious teachings of the Occident. He fondled the hand of his favourite and told her :

"He is mad, my Sweet-Flower—I tell you, the boy is mad. His mind is possessed by the barbarous theories of those Western devils."

But Madame Lovely-Torture consoled him :

"Do not be troubled, my very dear one. Before the fifteenth day of the eighth moon, he will have returned to the fold and, along towards the mid-autumn holiday, he will marry the daughter of Chang Ching Lo, whose friendship is essential to you if you are to continue to pocket thousands upon thousands of taels."



Paulette, standing in the window of the hotel, had seen her husband drive off in a luxurious motor car. This had filled her heart with high hopes so that his absence had not been so hard to bear. She felt assured that the two brothers would be reconciled to the situation and would, after an explanation, receive the young married couple with enthusiasm.

Consequently, Ho Chung's return was a great deception. He sincerely loved his wife. That was why he preferred to tell her that his elder brother, a traditionalist like all the Chinese of the old school, had refused to receive them under his roof and that the inevitable rupture had occurred.

"But," Paulette cried out, "how are we going to live?"

"Don't you worry on that score, my little sweetheart of the springtime, I am going to find some of my defunct father's old friends. With their help, I will speedily get a position and we will live very comfortably without accepting a thing from my

family, whom I despise and with whom I have finished for all time."

Ho Chung spoke with confidence. He particularly wanted Paulette to share his optimism, but, although she was somewhat relieved, she objected:

"I hope it will be as you say, dear. But, what about that fiancée you're supposed to have?"

"Oh! Naturally, I told my brother that I refused absolutely to continue to consider her in that light."

These brave words made Paulette very happy, and she exclaimed:

"You are a love. And what did he say?"

"He didn't like it a bit. I suspect him of shady business relations with the girl's father. But my brother's little schemes fail to interest me. Let's not talk any more about any of them. Let us think of our future."

"How much money have we left?"

"I have nearly a thousand Shanghai dollars—sufficient to live four or five months. To-morrow, I start looking for work. Be patient and be brave, my little wife."

That same evening, to amuse Paulette, he took her to the hotel dance, where a hundred Chinese taxi-girls, in long black, pink, blue or green dresses, danced for twenty-five cents with the customers of the place. Paulette was astounded. Ho Chung explained, not without pride:

"You see how modern China is becoming. We have taxi-girls just as they do in America. They wear silk stockings, they use French perfume, and they know how to dance the waltz and the tango."

"And don't any of the men wear pigtails nowadays?"

"Oh, no. The revolution cut the hair—not to speak of heads. A lot of heads."

Paulette made a face as she sipped her green tea and Ho Chung, who noticed her, said:

"You must get accustomed to China tea. We never put sugar in it."

Then they danced together, very close, body to body, brow to brow. The Chinese, furtively watching the blonde young Frenchwoman in the arms of their compatriot, took her for a Russian refugee, for one of the countless wrecks of the revolution, come from Siberia or Moukden and who now haunted the cabarets of Shanghai, from *Del Monte* to the sailor dens on North Setchouen Road. As they sat down, Paulette said:

"And I must get used to the food in your country—I am practising with chopsticks on sections of mandarines."

"You have many things to learn. Here we do countless things backwards—from the Occidental point of view. For instance, we start to read a book on the last page; our keys turn from right to left; we place our saucers on our cups; we dry our faces with hot, wet towels; we wear white when we are in mourning. If ever you are a widow, you must wear white in my honour."

"Oh, dear, please don't say such things."

"You must not fear death, Paulette."

"Tell me some more funny things about your country."

"Let me see; when we have our own house and

you receive a guest, you must always place him at table so that he faces the door of the dining-room."

"Why?"

"It is an ancient custom. When the guest can see the door he can be quickly on his guard if an enemy enters suddenly. Another thing, when you offer a cup of tea or a present to someone, you must do so with both your hands. And, if someone says to you: '*Kampai*,' you must quickly empty your little bowl of hot wine. You must also learn the first rules for conversation: it is correct to manifest an interest in the age and the appetite of the person to whom you are speaking. Old age is rather an honour, as are wrinkles. We never speak of wrinkles disrespectfully. And, on New Year's Day, you must say: 'May your wisdom increase with your years.' And you are always safe in wishing a young husband: 'A hundred sons and a thousand grandchildren.'"

"All that sounds reasonable——"

"Yes. But what you don't understand is that ours is a great country—why, you were eating roots in France, like a lot of savages, when we were already civilized and had been for three thousand years. Our civilization has been handed down from the mother's breast to the baby's lips. Some day, dear, I am going to compose some poems for you. Our ancestor in Hangchow, the grandfather with the white beard and the seventy-six years, still wields the brush like a youth."

"Really. He paints?"

"No, but he writes marvellous verses. Drink your tea, Paulette."

"It's so bitter."

"You'll get used to it. When I arrived in France, I thought cheese was awful, but I acquired the habit. But if you were to offer a bit of Roquefort or Camembert to a real Chinese he would tell you that he was not in the habit of eating decayed food."

"Oh! Look at those old women at the back of the room. They're wearing trousers."

"They are the '*amahs*' of the taxi-girls. Millions of peasant-women and women of the lower classes wear trousers."

"I've only been in China three days and already I've discovered all sorts of anomalies——"

"But we find anomalies everywhere. There was an American who found some of our customs extraordinary and he mentioned it to a Chinese, who asked him :

"But you dress in evening clothes sometimes, don't you ? "

"Of course," the American answered.

"Have you ever looked carefully at the tail of your coat ? "

"No, I don't believe I have. Why ? "

"Oh, simply because you will find that there are two buttons just above the tails. But, where are the buttonholes ? "

"There aren't any."

"Then, why the buttons ? "

"Why ? Why, I don't know."

"You see ? Another anomaly."

Paulette laughed :

"Now that I think of it, the Chinese was right."

Ho Chung and his wife got up to go. They strolled along the Avenue Edouard VII, turned into Bubbling Wells Road, near the racecourse, and stopped outside the *Little Club*. This was the fashionable cabaret, frequented by the "best people" of the international set in Shanghai. Ho Chung made some discreet inquiries of the doorman, who was a compatriot. He quickly learned that the drinks were too expensive for him, and he dragged Paulette away. She was reluctant to go because she was fascinated by several American women in evening dress who were arriving in luxurious automobiles.

They supped frugally, standing up in a place at the corner of Hankow Road. The menu consisted of lukewarm spaghetti, slices of radish and fruit jelly, washed down with a red soda-water, purported to be melted ruby dust. Paulette played with the feast. She would have liked a good ham sandwich.

"Let's go home," Ho Chung suggested as he carefully counted the change which the wandering restaurant-keeper handed him. "To-morrow's another day and I've got to start looking for work."

And so they returned to the *Great Eastern*. Paulette was astonished to see, at midnight, this same noisy, excited crowd like so many ants delirious for no reason. And the shops were still lighted. And there were pedestrians who had no place to go. And there were rickshas which found customers at all hours of the day and night. She could see that, at the back of the stores, they were arguing as excitedly as in the middle of the day and that, in some of the shops, workmen and women were

bending over their tasks. Rickshas were parked up alleys; coolies were telling fairy stories to one another; women were crouched in doorways with children who should have been in bed hours ago; washerwomen, tailors and cobblers were hard at work. And, over there, in the direction of the International Concession, on the sidewalk of the Avenue Edouard VII, yellow prostitutes in dresses of blue or black silk, bareheaded, chaperoned by their duennas, were pacing up and down, sentinels of vice, annoying the few men who were going home to bed alone.

As they crossed a narrow street which led to the *Great Eastern*, Paulette saw two coolies doing their level best to strangle each other, beneath the indifferent eye of a Chinese who was leaning comfortably against his door. A man in a Chinese gown brushed against her. He was running noiselessly over the pavestones. Paulette was frightened. She clung tight to Ho Chung, who, indifferent to these common little street dramas, was wrapped up in his optimistic plans for the future.

CHAPTER V

HO CHUNG MEETS THE LEARNED GENTLEMAN AND THE MOUNTAIN OF JADE

HO CHUNG had been in his native land three solid months and not one of his compatriots had manifested the intention of giving him gold. His title of engineer failed to assure for him the brilliant future he had anticipated. His father's old friends had received him with great kindness and after a good deal of effort he had been engaged as a salesman in a Chinese hat shop on the rue du Consulat.

He had taken this place temporarily, although he had sensed that he was debasing himself by selling felt *made in Japan* to the élite of Shanghai. And he was a little disgusted when he realized that he had studied the law of gravity, trigonometry and chemistry for no better reason than to retail soft greys and cameleon blues and checkered caps at a dollar apiece.

He finally quit this place to find a better one. At the Electricity Company of Greater Shanghai they told him that there were twenty-six Chinese engineers on the waiting list. At the Société Astra, the chief engineer, a German, informed him with cynical brutality :

" But you have studied in France. Why don't you go to the gentlemen of the French Concession ?

They're sure to take you on as a bottle-emptier. It's up to them to look after you. They owe you a living."

Days and weeks slipped by. Ho Chung and Paulette had moved ages ago because the *Great Eastern* was too expensive. They had taken a room on the rue Stanislas-Chevalier, where their neighbours were the chauffeur of an armoured car, belonging to the French guard, married to an Anamese, and a Corsican cook, who was working in a little hotel on the Avenue Joffre and was living with a Russian girl, who was selling books in the English shop on Nanking Road.

Paulette was doing her own housework. She was patient and resigned and she did all she could to encourage her husband. But if, in her letters to her mother, she gave the impression of being very gay and light-hearted, at night, lying beside her husband, who slept like a top, exhausted after having visited every nook and corner of the city in search for work, she sometimes stared for enduring hours at the ceiling, asking herself what would happen when their last dollars were gone.

Ho Chung's optimism was only a memory now. His repeated setbacks had disgusted him with men in general, whether they were yellow or white. The unfair distribution of money, the avarice of the employers, the faulty organisation of a community which was incapable of judging at his worth a man of his talent and capacity—all that embittered him and only served to make him more than ever the enemy of a cruel, ungrateful, detestable society.

One night as he was walking home, more tired

than ever, he met, at the corner of the bridge of Souchow Creek, the two Chinese who had come to seek him out on board the *Aramis*, Li Yu Chan and Wou Hio Li. They bowed to him. He recognised their salutation. Wou Hio Li, who was clad in the same black suit he had worn before, declared, after the customary exchange of compliments :

" We are extremely happy to meet you, comrade ! The fact is, we were looking for you."

" For me ? What for ? "

" Because the chief wants to talk to you. But we can't talk here with that Sikh policeman looking at us."

Wou Hio Li smiled ironically and added :

" He is capable of repeating our conversation to His Majesty the King of England and of drawing fire from that British cruiser anchored off *Cathay* ! Come along with us."

The comrades Wou Hio Li and Li Yu Chan, whose names meant The Learned Gentleman and The Mountain of Jade, took Ho Chung into a house where tea was served and which was frequented exclusively by Chinese. In a sequestered corner they continued their conversation.

" Comrade," said Wou Hio Li as he caressed his delicate cup with his long yellow fingers, " we have been surprised that you have failed to come to see us since your arrival."

Ho Chung explained in a few words that he had been busy every minute seeking a situation which he had as yet to find.

" A situation ? But why do you wear out your shoe leather, begging rice from your enemies when

your friends ask nothing better than to give you all you want ? ”

“ Comrade, exactly what do you mean by that ? ”

“ Your intelligence is too unusual to leave you in the dark. For months, you have been looking for a place you have not found. Your Occidental friends have initiated you into the secrets of their knowledge, but they have evidently failed to show you how to turn that knowledge into good solid nourishment. I wouldn't offend you for the world, comrade, but I must say that you remind me of those one-legged birds which were remarked one day in the province of Shantung. The governor couldn't believe his eyes and he asked Confucius to explain the miracle. The sage replied : ‘ That bird is known as the Shang-Yang and is a sign of rain. ’ Thereafter, the small boys of the province tried to rid the land of drought and famine by hopping around on one leg ! That's precisely what you're doing at the moment. You go hopping from door to door waving your foreign diplomas in the fond hope that a square meal will fall into your mouth. Why haven't you once thought of us ? ”

“ Because my first desire was to provide for my wife. That is my duty. When she wants for nothing, I can devote myself wholeheartedly to the interests of the Cause.”

“ And that's just where you make your big mistake. Our leader has you in mind and he even counts greatly on your assistance. Shall you be free this evening ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Very well. I'll wait for you at the corner of

North Chekiang Road and the bridge of Souchow Creek. I'll have a ricksha for you and I'll take you with me to the meeting."

* * *

Ho Chung was punctual to the minute for his engagement, as was the comrade Wou Hio Li. Without useless ceremony, the latter signed to him to get into a ricksha and the two coolies set off in the direction of Chapei. It had been raining. Their feet scrunched on the damp asphalt and their coarse clothing was still soaked from the downpour.

After about half an hour, they stopped outside a small house which stood up alone on the deserted land of Chapei, between a shed and the ruins of an apartment house which still bore the marks of Japanese shells. This isolated dwelling, far from police surveillance, might have been constructed especially for clandestine gatherings. As a matter of fact, it served at regular intervals for the conferences of the Shanghai delegates of the Chinese Communist Secret Police. However, to avoid all danger of suspicion, these meetings were never held under the same roof twice in succession.

Ho Chung and his companions crossed an empty shop and suddenly found themselves face to face with seven Chinese who were seated around a table covered with peanut shells and melon seeds. A lamp, suspended from the ceiling, fell on their shiny hair and threw a crude light on their serious faces which were alert and cruel.

They were listening attentively to a man who, when the necessary introductions had been made, went on with his speech. He spoke in a low tone,

rather like someone who was confiding a dire secret than like an orator:

"At the present moment, comrade Chen is dissatisfied because we have not made sufficient progress since the memorable and heroic days when Li Dah Tchao, preaching the good word right here in Shanghai, was hung by Tchang Tso Lin in 1927. And comrade Chen is right. The fall of the government of Wuhan, the *coup d'état* of Chiang Kai Chek, the departure of Borodine, the defeat of our brothers at Canton—all those events have retarded the triumph of our cause. Nevertheless, we have gained ground during the past year."

"Not enough!" protested Tcheng Siao San, a young fellow from the Shansi, a former carriage-maker with the hands of a strangler. He belonged to the secret brigade of the executioners.

"We should be in complete control from Canton to the frontiers of Mongolia!" another enthusiast insisted.

"Hold on a minute. Let me finish. To what do we owe the recent advance? To the foundation of our police force on the Russian system——"

"Absolutely! Quite right!"

"When Kou Tchen Tchang organised us he gave the Cause the secret service and propaganda bureau which had been lacking up till then. We provide our comrades of the Central Executive Committee with correct information. And we punish, quietly and without scandal, the traitors and deserters."

At these words, Tcheng Siao San, whose name meant the "Little Three," clucked like a hen:

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Do you remember, com-

rade, how I made Souen sing with my file operating on his eyelids ? ”

Tcheng's two nearest neighbours chuckled at this reference to an exceptionally rare form of torture. The speaker went on :

“ All that is fine as far as it goes. But our weakness lies in our propaganda with the masses.”

“ And why is that ? ”

“ Simply because we haven't enough money. It's far more important for us to win over ten men to our cause than it is to do away with one unfaithful brother. But to get ten, a hundred or a thousand followers it is necessary to dispose of as many pieces of silver.”

“ And where are we going to get the pieces of silver ? ”

“ The taxes from the provinces under the Bolshevik regime do not suffice. The Kiangsi is pumped dry and the funds of the Komintern are not adequate.”

“ Well then ? ”

The orator lowered his voice still more :

“ Comrade Teng Fah is going to join us this evening to outline his plan of action.”

There was a silence. The imminent arrival of the great chief of the Chinese Communist Secret Police flattered the pride of all those present. To pass the time away, they questioned Ho Chung, who gave them an idea of the organisation in France from the standpoint of propaganda and economic espionage. He was addressing an interested audience when the door opened suddenly and noiselessly and Teng Fah appeared.

He was greeted with all the respect which was due him. He stopped before Ho Chung, who was introduced by Wou Hio Li, and exclaimed :

" Ah ! So you're Ho Chung ? And you returned from France three months ago. You should have joined us before this. But all is well, since the comrades have brought you this evening. I'll tell you why later on."

Teng Fah was an exceptionally clever man. His position required a particularly active mind and a general education of an unusual sort. He had studied in Moscow. The chiefs of the Komintern had not only taught him the doctrine of the Party but the management necessary to its well-being. He spoke Russian, Cantonese, mandarin and the language of Shanghai.

On this occasion, he conferred with the seven principals one by one, then with Ho Chung and his friends and, finally, sitting down at the table and lighting an American cigarette, he said :

" It has been explained to you, comrades, that our propaganda is suffering from lack of funds. It devolves upon us to find money. We have decided to find it. Where, you will ask ? But nothing is simpler. We'll find it in the possession of those who have too much. I have just come from Canton, where I gave the necessary directions to our representatives. The first great personality who is to be 'invited' to help our Cause is Sir Eugene Liang."

The mention of this name made a sensation in the gathering.

" Eugene Liang ? " Wou Hio Li repeated with

the air of knowing perfectly the circumstances of this personage.

"Who is this Eugene Liang?" snarled the executioner from the Shansi.

"For the benefit of the comrades who have never heard of him," Teng Fah continued, "he is a Cantonese and one of the richest bankers of Hong Kong. We have no reason to spare him, particularly as he has been knighted in England and has become a British subject."

"But, in that case, he is protected by the guns of His Majesty," Wou Hio Li objected.

"When we invite him to come to our assistance *in his own interests*, he will understand that all the Hindu police from Seymour Road to Des Voeux Road will be powerless to defend him from our wrath if he refuses our friendly invitation. Tcheng, am I right or not?"

The executioner clucked joyously. His hilarity was of a sinister nature and somehow resembled the clanking of chains.

"Hah! Haah! Haaah! Two nice little taps on each eyelid with my trusty file and the dollars pop out of pocket-books with the tightest clasps!"

The memory of a pair of eyes filed until the sclerotic had burst amused the throng considerably. When the laughter died down, Teng Fah went on:

"In Canton, we have found another 'spontaneous donor.'"

"'Spontaneous donor!' What a famous way of putting it," muttered the Learned Gentleman.

Teng Fah accepted the compliment gracefully.

"Isn't it, comrade? Well, as I was saying, we

have a 'spontaneous donor, in the person of Suen Ting K'ai, the jade king. His precious stones will be far more useful converted into money for the Red army than placed on the shoulders of the concubines of nationalist generals. At Fouchow, I have what we need—a munition merchant who will prefer to supply us with machine-guns than to have his junks sunk by pirates. And now I come to Shanghai."

Teng Fah paused. Everyone leaned forward. His listeners were intensely interested. The executioner from the Shansi swallowed his saliva. He was already visualising charming tortures to be administered.

"In Shanghai, there are two 'benefactors' whose generosity we should be able to stimulate: Du She Wei, the drug king, and one of his silent partners whose name I'll give you. As you know, Du She Wei was our enemy three years ago. He helped the traitors of Nankin to put down our uprisings. But the *accidents* I have strewn in the path of his opium caravans and the notice I have served upon him will, I feel certain, cause him to alter his opinion of our Cause and to better understand where his duty lies in our regard. In a few minutes, I shall give our comrade Wou Hio Li the instructions which have to do with his case. And that brings me to Du She Wei's silent associate——"

Teng Fah turned toward Ho Chung, studied him with the narrowed eyes of the interrogator which kill all falsehood and reticence at a distance, and added:

"The anonymous partner, comrade, is your elder brother, Ho Ta Wen——"

CHAPTER VI

YOUR BROTHER IS A SCOUNDREL

HO CHUNG's neighbours around the table considered him in silence. If they were surprised, they artfully concealed all signs of astonishment.

Ho Chung, very much embarrassed, asked :

"Are you sure that my elder brother is associated with Du She Wei? My brother is a wastrel and spends his time in gambling dens."

"Yes, but all the money which he stakes and loses—because he rarely wins—well, do you imagine that he inherited it from your defunct father? Actually, he dissipated that fortune ages ago. The present wealth of your brother is the direct result of his association with Chang Ching Lo, who also shares in the profits of the opium ring."

It was clear that Teng Fah was singularly well-informed, because Chang Ching Lo was the name of the father of the fiancée Ho Chung's family was endeavouring to force him to marry. Teng Fah continued :

"But, although we know for an absolute fact that your elder brother participates in the profits of the drug traffic, we are in ignorance of the amount he receives. Consequently, we lack a basis upon which to tax him. And we must be correctly informed on this point. And—the only man who can be of service to us in this case is yourself!"

Once again all the eyes in the room were focussed on Ho Chung, who did not reply. He had been pushed brutally against the wall and, now, but two courses lay open to him: he could scale the wall or he could flee. This was a trying predicament for a Chinese who had been raised to respect the family and to believe in the cult of loyalty between men of the same blood. His elder brother had exiled him from his house and had wounded him in his love and his dignity. And even so, Ho Chung did not say readily to Teng Fah: "Command, comrade. I will obey." On the contrary, after a moment of reflection, he murmured:

"Are you asking me to sacrifice my brother to the Cause?"

A new silence fell over the group. Now all eyes were concentrated on the great chief. Everyone was curious to see how he would react to Ho Chung's hesitation. The reaction was immediate. It was not violent. He spoke with admirable calm. But he was doubly impressive for that very reason. He expressed himself posedly, with the unquestionable authority of a man who is accustomed to command:

"Yes. I have turned to you because no one else can aid us in this instance. Listen carefully, comrade. Were you aware that your brother was making every penny of his money and living in luxury, thanks to opium smuggling?"

"I was not."

"And do you approve of him?"

"I do not."

"Can you condone a man, even your own brother,

for enriching himself by exacting enormous profits for that poison which he helps to spread amongst the Chinese people? Furthermore, can you pardon him for squandering that ill-gotten gain in the stupidest of fashions—playing fantan? Comrades, I call upon you to judge——"

An ugly grumble was the unanimous response.

"No! I cannot pardon that!" Ho Chung confessed at last.

The chief stood up and, standing behind Ho Chung, who sensed his presence and thrilled beneath his magnetic personality, continued:

"Very well. Then where does your duty lie? Does it consist of respecting a scoundrel who is a public calamity, a worthless worm like a parasite on the trunk of a tall tree, or does it consist of lending all your assistance to the triumph of a cause which has been dear to your heart for years?"

"My duty lies with you."

Ho Chung's determined answer brought forth a chorus of "*hao! hao!*" (hear! hear!) from the assembly. And Teng Fah lost no time in sealing the agreement. He motioned to his new ally to follow him. He took him into a corner in the other room and there, seated face to face on stools, the two men had a confidential interview.

"Comrade," began the leader, "I am in possession of detailed information concerning you. You were engaged to the daughter of Chang Ching Lo, and your brother, furious because of your marriage to a Frenchwoman, has shut his door in your face. You are in difficulties. But, beginning to-morrow, you will enter the service of our police and, like

your comrades who are here to-night, you will be paid for your services. Your first mission will be to make peace—to all appearances—with your brother and to return to the paternal home."

"But I can only accomplish that by promising to marry the daughter of his associate, Chang Ching Lo. And—that—I absolutely cannot do!"

"Quite so! But who is going to force you to keep your promise later on? No one!"

"But—after I've given my word?"

"The advancement of our Cause is more important than any promise. You will return, I say, to the house of your brother and, once you are intimate with your surroundings, it will be your mission to acquaint yourself with the amount of his fortune. If the man, as we believe, is worth at least fifteen million dollars, it would be unpardonable on our part were we to ask him for a paltry twenty-five thousand. If, on the other hand, he has but two millions, we would be wasting our time were we to tax him at three millions. My principle is to impose strictly reasonable 'spontaneous donations.' You thoroughly understand?"

Ho Chung nodded by way of acquiescence. To encourage him, Teng Fah put his hand on his shoulder and concluded almost in a whisper:

"I quite understand why you hesitated at first. But, knowing as I do that you are sincere in your convictions and that you are passionately devoted to the cause of Communism, I want you to inject into your heart the ardent desire to aid us in every way you can."

He stood up and Ho Chung followed his example. He asked the chief :

" How am I to communicate with you when I have fulfilled my mission ? "

" Never by a written message. Every week you will receive the visit of an old wandering cobbler who will offer to re-sole your shoes. If you have anything of interest to report to me, you have only to say to him : ' Old uncle—I want a new pair of shoes.' He will understand and will bring you to me. And now, I advise you to leave here alone. We never go out together. We shall meet soon again, comrade."

Ho Chung said good night to the other members of the group and went his way. The night was black. The red signs in the distance gave to the sky the appearance of Hell's fires. Ho Chung turned into North Setchouen Road and was promptly lost in the crowd. He walked rapidly. He had forgotten his weariness of mind and body. Was he inspired by the importance of his mission ? Was it Teng Fah's power of suggestion which had aroused his enthusiasm ? Was it the desire to avenge himself on his brother, who had received him so abominably, had assumed the airs of a protector and had scarcely bothered to conceal his contempt for Paulette ? Whatever it was, Ho Chung was conscious of a joy so new, of an *energy so unexpected and of an importance so un hoped-for* that he could hardly wait to tell his wife. To save the price of a ricksha, he crossed Shanghai on foot and it was one o'clock in the morning when he finally reached his lodgings.

Paulette was sound asleep. Ordinarily he would

not have disturbed her but, this night, he awoke her brusquely and, while she was still rubbing her eyes, he cried :

“ My little sweetheart of the springtime—soon we shall be living in the big paternal home—the days without sunshine are finished for us. At last, the sky above our heads is bright ! ”

Paulette did not quite take in the meaning of all this. She merely gathered that he had brought good news. She offered him her lips and he drew her to him almost savagely.

* * *

Two days later, in the home of the Ho family, toward seven in the evening as the supper hour was approaching, Apple-Blossom, the devoted servant of Madame Lovely-Torture, hurried across the courtyard and into the pavilion where her mistress lived. It was a small one-storey dwelling, situated in the middle of the Court of the Sycamores. Above it, this evening, a family of crows was flying from branch to branch. The servant, clad in black trousers and white shirt with a high collar, hurried as fast as her little steps would carry her. She found her mistress on her knees in front of a dressing-table without legs. Madame Lovely-Torture was putting on her make-up. She had covered her face with a very white background and was now passing over it a light coating of yellow-red powder. It was her whim this night to make her husband think of the pure and delicate tint of the lotus flower.

“ Very honoured one,” said Apple-Blossom as

she bowed almost to the floor, "the master entreats you to come to see him."

"When?"

"Now! Immediately! He is in a great hurry!"

"Why?"

Apple-Blossom lowered her voice:

"Liang, who always knows everything before it happens, told me that it was something to do with Master Brother Two——"

Madame Lovely-Torture raised her brows. She was curious like all women. She hastily added the finishing touches to her beauty and ordered her servant to tell the master that she would come at once. Glancing over her wardrobe, she selected a house jacket of pale green silk, embroidered with mauve flowers and lined with fur because it was a cool evening and the house, like all Chinese houses, was badly heated.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was waiting for her. He was sipping his tea in little gulps. His fat, bloated face was beaming with contentment and, because he had far too much blood, he was fanning himself although it was far from warm in his room. When he saw Madame Lovely-Torture on the threshold, he beckoned to her gaily and cried:

"Come quickly, sweet flower—I have news for you."

"About Brother Two?"

"What! You know already?"

"I don't know anything, but something tells me that it has something to do with him."

"You are invariably right, my little sweetheart. Yes—it is about Brother Two. Do you remember

your prophecy? You told me that he would accept our conditions before the fifteenth day of the eighth moon."

"I remember perfectly."

"Well, so he does. I received a message from him this morning. He desired to see me at once. Suspecting that he was ready to listen to reason I accorded him an interview right away. He has just left me."

"Yes? And——?"

"Well, he has consented to marry Precious Jade at a date to be determined. That being the case, I told him that he could install himself under my roof with his French concubine. After all, what does it matter to us provided that she, also, is willing to accept the humiliating position which will be hers?"

"But are you sure that she really does accept?"

"Brother Two assures me that there is no cause for worry on that score."

"And he is ready to marry Precious Jade?"

"He has given me his word."

"When?"

"He asked for a delay of six months. I granted it. I am delighted with this fortunate solution of the problem, for I may as well tell you that Chang Ching Lo was really mortified by the rupture. He went so far as to tell me, on one occasion, that I lacked authority and that I was not even capable of controlling my own family. And you know that my association with Chang is the source of practically all my income."

Madam Lovely-Torture pouted.

" And what is it that troubles you, my sweet flower ? "

" The thought of having to tolerate that foreigner in the house for six whole months. Because, what is she anyway—a vile creature come to us from out of the West ? "

" Bah ! Don't let that worry you, my perfumed corona. Six months will pass quickly enough and, as soon as Brother Two marries his fiancée, the French wretch will be relegated to her proper place. Come ! Smile at me ! I want to gaze upon that smile which is like the dawn of a new day."

Madame Lovely-Torture produced one of her best made-to-order smiles. Ho Ta Wen, satisfied, toyed with her wrist and added :

" I am so delighted with the turn of events that I am going to send for Kao, the jeweller. The other day, he offered me a necklace of jade as pure as emeralds. He'll bring it with him to-morrow and, if you like it, I'll buy it for you."

This time, a real smile of satisfaction brightened the pretty face of the concubine. Joyously, she clapped her hands to order supper while Ho Ta Wen continued to gargle his tea with a noise similar to that of a duck exploring a pond with its yellow beak.

CHAPTER VII

MISS PERFORATED-LOTUS, LADY'S MAID

PAULETTE, a true *Parisienne*, was the improved and corrected 1935 edition of her ancestor, Mimi Pinson. Easy of virtue, light of heart and free of speech, a former pupil of the *Maternelle* and of the *Ecole Professionnelle* of dressmaking of the fifth arrondissement, she would doubtless have found work with a fashionable *couturier* had not her mother, who was not the widow of an officer of the *chasseurs d'Afrique* as was befitting of the gay ladies of the Second Empire but of a plain artillery adjutant, acquired a tobacco shop in the Latin Quarter.

With her carefree and adventurous attitude toward life, Paulette found the tobacco shop an excellent temporary solution to all her problems for, from behind the counter, she could smile at all the agreeable customers. A certain number of law students, future politicians, druggists, architects and doctors were acquainted with the blonde girl of the rue de l'Abbé de l'Épée, and went out of their way to buy *Three Castles* or *Lucky Strikes* to compare her curls with Virginia tobacco or her smiles with those of Norma Shearer. Paulette, flattered, gave change, chatted and flirted. Sentimental at times, she sometimes dreamed as she waved her hair and was tempted to weep when she read novels

borrowed from the shelves in the shop. On Sundays in the summer time when the street was deserted and she replaced her mother, who liked to lie down on hot afternoons, she gazed enviously at a lovely odalisque, smoking on the banks of the Nile—this was a present offered by the makers of a brand of Egyptian cigarettes—and she was haunted by the magic of that mystifying word: Orient! This word played havoc with the imagination of the young *Parisienne*. It fascinated her like the balmy perfume of enchanted gardens. The Orient, for her, was a wonderful theatre with a curtain which went up somewhere beyond Marseilles and, on its stage, she could make appear, according to her fancy, the velvet eyes of Mussulman women with the tempting yashmak, the mask with the glassy stare of strange India, the yellow and savage grimace of boundless China, the pale and timid smile of the geishas in the daylight fireworks of cherry blossoms. She was not too sure just exactly where all these faces and places were, but she surrounded the cardboard obalisque with these vague visions and she was annoyed by the stray customer who disturbed her reverie with a brutal :

“A package of blues, Mademoiselle, and a box of matches. Thank you——”

Poor Paulette was thus transported from the banks of the Nile to the banks of the Seine, and from the shadow of the Sphinx to the statue of Messieurs Pelletier and Caventou, those two glories of pharmacy whose stiff frock coats stood at the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Michel!

Now, those dreams had become a reality which

thrilled her and amused her, but frightened her just a little. Alone in the little room in the French Concession, surrounded by this mixture of races, rubbing elbows every day with the Anamese soldier, the Russian exile, the Hindu policeman, the English bluejacket, the light-footed Chinese man or the fragile Chinese woman, she saw the fondest of her dreams fade away almost hourly. The Far East was no longer that beautiful odalisque in the tobacco shop; it was a world she failed to understand, was powerless to enter into—a world which was all but hostile, where the men seemed to be able to see through closed lids.



It was four in the afternoon. Greatly excited, Paulette had taken her place beside her husband in the car of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, who had finally made up his mind to receive his young brother and his foreign sister-in-law. At last, Paulette was to meet her husband's family. Her heart beat madly.

"Perhaps I should remind you, my little wife," said Ho Chung, "that all the members of the household are quite ignorant of your customs. Don't shake hands, because they wouldn't understand the meaning of the gesture. It will be unnecessary for you to perform the *K'o t'ou*, which consists of prostrating oneself three times and of striking the forehead on the floor three times. But I suggest that you join your two clenched fists and move them up and down at the height of your bosom as you bow very slightly. You remember? I've showed you how——"

" Yes—yes—I know how to do that—but, dear, I've never been so nervous ! "

" There's no reason why you should be. Everything will be quite agreeable. "

" But I still can't understand why your brother has suddenly changed his mind ! "

Ho Chung had revealed nothing to his wife of his affiliation with the Chinese Communist Secret Police. Whereas a European husband would have confided everything to the woman he loved, Ho Chung's personal code and his sentimental discipline restrained him. He adored Paulette, but his secrets were his own. Consequently, she had no idea of how this apparent reconciliation had been brought about. He had contented himself with a vague story of how his family had been moved to pity by their desperate financial situation. He had told her :

" They're not really bad people at heart and I confess that I'm overjoyed, particularly on your account, because now we'll be assured of comfort and excellent treatment by them all. "

The automobile stopped in the first courtyard and Liang hurried to open the door. This old servant had always had a preference for the young Brother Two, and he was now secretly rejoicing to see him returning to the paternal home.

" The elder Master is waiting for you in the big parlour. " And he whispered : " I am very happy—you have chosen a favourable day— " "

Ho Chung entered first, followed by Paulette, who was more nervous than ever. This great house, surrounded by high walls, that courtyard guarded

by big blonde men with firearms, these silent servants, those two stone dragons with horrible heads on either side of the steps—all these things bewildered and frightened her.

They went into the big parlour where Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, and the younger brother were standing. The customary greetings were exchanged and Ho Chung interpreted their words of welcome. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was most agreeable and really seemed to be glad to see them. Then the mother appeared and it was she who assumed the responsibility of introducing Paulette into the apartments where the women lived. It had been decided that Paulette should have, as a personal maid, a young native of Shanghai who had served in the Concession and spoke a little French. Her name was Perforated-Lotus, but, for all that, she was a virtuous and honourable girl.

Gay, talkative and extremely sophisticated, Perforated-Lotus was very proud that she had been chosen because she spoke a foreign language. It gave her a certain importance in the eyes of the other servants. Tagging after Paulette, who was following Madame the Mother, she whispered as she touched her mistress' skirt :

"Jolie lobe! Vely pletty dless! Noumélo Un!"

She was incapable of pronouncing an R, and she mixed doubtful French with pidgin English, but she managed to make herself understood.

Madame The Mother first presented the foreign daughter-in-law to the lawful wife of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. Madame Pearl-of-the-Dragon was pretty

enough, but she was too thin. She was timid and retiring in her manner. She greeted Paulette amiably, chewing melon seeds all the time and fixing her attention on the Frenchwoman's grey suede slippers, of which she evidently approved.

From there, the procession crossed the Court of the Pines. Perforated-Lotus, trotting along behind Paulette, continued to volunteer valuable advice and information, like one of Cook's conscientious guides :

"Savez la glande Madame? Femme Noumélo Un du Master. No good! No good Missi! Pas d'enfants——"

Paulette was escorted into the pavilion reserved for her sister-in-law, Madame Supreme-Good-Luck, who was busily engaged in feeding rice to her children, two little maggots, aged three and four, respectively. They already handled their chopsticks with great dexterity. But, when they saw this white woman with yellow hair, they yelled lustily and buried their faces in the dress of Madame Supreme-Good-Luck, who, looking daggers, exchanged a few rapid words with her mother.

Paulette, little imagining that she had been roundly cursed, tried to caress the children, who only screamed louder than ever. Turning to her maid, she said :

"Tell Madame that I think her babies are lovely and that I would like to kiss them."

But Perforated-Lotus took Paulette's hand and begged her :

"Come! Come! Missi think Flench lady no good for babies. No good! Come quick! No touch babies!"

Regretfully, Paulette obeyed. She was terribly upset to think that she had frightened her two little nephews and she would have liked to be able to explain to their mother how much she loved children. But she was almost dragged off to the pavilion of Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day, the young wife of the younger brother. She was barely eighteen and did honour to the legendary beauty of the girls of Souchow. She was in bed because, less than two months before, she had given birth to a daughter, in direct contradiction to the predictions of the fortune-tellers. Brother-Three had been forced to do without the red eggs which signify the birth of a boy.

Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day had the wane face of a young mother who has been cared for by those Chinese women who make a speciality of maternity. She gazed with surprise at the Frenchwoman with the blonde, curly hair and, through the good offices of Perforated-Lotus, asked her if she had been a mother.

"No!" the servant announced emphatically. And never lacking for an explanation, she went on: "In her country, they have a child every ten years. She will have hers in the year of the rat."

"How unfortunate!" cried Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day with sincere sympathy.

Paulette left this pavilion with Madame The Mother and, out in the courtyard, she learned from Perforated-Lotus that she was *now* about to be presented to a most important lady, the second wife of Ho Ta Wen, the real ruling force of the

paternal home. She crossed a garden which was beautifully cared for and which boasted a little pond. There were young saplings, azaleas and a house for tame pigeons. The pavilion was much more luxurious than the others.

Apple-Blossom, in person, ushered the visitors into the presence of Madame Lovely-Torture who, having been given fair warning, had put on a figured gown of exquisite pale blue silk and had hung orange blossoms around her neck. Her manner was dignified and haughty. It was plain that she knew she was the favourite and that her word was law.

She responded condescendingly to Paulette's salutations and—a detail which had not occurred to the other women—asked Perforated-Lotus if the Master had assigned an apartment to Paulette. She was informed that the young couple was to occupy the pavilion in the West Court.

"Very well," she told Perforated-Lotus. "But that woman, who doesn't even know how to speak Chinese, is dressed like a monkey. She must not be allowed to wear such absurd clothes under our roof. I will see to it that she is provided with everything that's necessary to make a decent appearance."

* * *

An hour later, Paulette and her baggage were installed in a comfortable room on the ground floor. It was furnished in black wood and the windows were of carved panels with transparent paper in place of glass. Perforated-Lotus displayed an unusual interest in the unpacking and was enchanted

when she saw the underthings which her new mistress was accustomed to wear.

"Here, Madame," she said gaily, "*lingelie* no good!"

When everything was in order, she brought a big bowl of hot water and handed Paulette a bath towel with the instructions to rub her face and hands vigorously. This rite having been accomplished, she served tea, sat down crossed legged opposite her mistress and suggested:

"Supper soon, Madame. You put on *lobe*—Chinese *lobe* for supper——"

Paulette was amused by this jargon and she asked:

"Where did you learn all your languages, Perforated-Lotus?"

"First Master Concession Français. Then Anamese boy talky-talky français, vely good français. Me, catchee-catchee français vely quick! You plomenade avec moa!"

Paulette asked amusedly:

"What?"

"You plomenade avec moa? Anamese boy, he say that evely time me ask him help me wash."

She opened a huge drawer behind a black lacquer screen on which the artist had painted the country life of the peasants of the Kwangtung. This drawer contained the Chinese garments that Paulette was to wear in the future.

In China, the peasant women spend next to nothing for clothes. In summer as well as in winter, they wind a long cotton band around their breasts, they have black trousers crossed over the abdomen

and tied at the ankles. This costume is completed by a coarse blue cotton coat, padded in cold weather. Madame Lovely-Tortune had not dared to inflict such a disguise on her own sister-in-law; not that she would have hesitated to insult her for a minute, but simply that it would have been a reflection on the family honour. The neighbours and the servants might have gossiped and said that she was the favourite concubine of a man whose sister-in-law came from the very dregs of society. Therefore, she had chosen from her wardrobe—thanks to the generosity of the Elder it was amply garnished—some very stylish robes which she had only worn two or three times and of which she was already tired.

Paulette had undressed, a little embarrassed in front of Perforated-Lotus, who had watched her every second and had enthused:

"Oh! You much more pretty than my last Madame. She no old, but she have two thing in front that fall like two lanterns in the rain."

She helped her mistress with her brassiere and, pulling it very tight, she explained:

"Chinese man no like much breasts. No! No! Like flat front! You understand? That way no can play catchee-catchee!"

Paulette chose a pair of rose-coloured drawers with elastics around the thighs. Then she put on a pair of white silk socks which came almost to the knees and she wore her European slippers which were allowed by the Chinese fashion judges. After that she slipped on a pretty dress of mauve silk with a pink border and an army officer's collar which buttoned under the right arm. The skirt

was split on both sides so as to show the legs up to the knees.

Paulette had the impression that she was getting ready for a masquerade ball. She was so excited that she had already forgotten the cold reception of her Chinese relatives. She thought only of the present, and, when Perforated-Lotus stopped making her laugh for a minute, she rejoiced in the doll's house where she was installed. She had never seen anything like it before. The walls were covered with rolls of paper on which a poet had brushed enormous, fantastic characters which had no connection with reality.

She was ready when her husband came into her room. He began by engaging in a long conversation with Perforated-Lotus. Having sent her about her business, he asked Paulette :

" Well ? How do you like your new home ? "

" I think it's wonderful, dear. And how do you like me in your native costume ? "

" You're charming, my little wife. They tell me that Madame Lovely-Torture lent you those things. I have no objection to make. It is more suitable for you to dress that way while you're here. I, too, intend to wear the customary robe in the house. And, since there's nothing European here, of course we'll eat with the traditional chopsticks. You've made the acquaintance of all the ladies ? "

" Yes. "

" What do you think of them ? "

" Well, they weren't very friendly. There was one especially—I think she's the second wife of your elder brother—who is convinced that she came

out of Jupiter's thigh. She's the one they call Eul Nai Nai."

"That's Madame Lovely-Torture. She's the Second Madame. She is extremely influential, because she can twist my brother around her little finger. Under the circumstances, the best procedure is to keep on good terms with her."

"Dear, tell me—are we going to live in this pavilion?"

"Of course. As you've already seen, every member of the family has his own private house in his own private garden. The park outside is ours. Now and then, we'll eat with Elder Brother and Brother Three. I have instructed Perforated-Lotus to be very good to you. I'll give her a good *camsho*."

"*Camsho*? What's that?"

"A tip. It's an Anglo-Chinese corruption of the word 'commission.'"

"And—dear—what are you going to do here?"

"Do? Oh! I'll be busy enough. With my brother's business."

"What business?"

"I'll tell you all about it later on."

Ho Chung considered that enough for the time being, and Paulette did not insist because she knew that it was useless to get her husband to talk when he was determined to guard a silence.

A gong sounded in the courtyard.

"Supper time, my little wife. Come with me."

Paulette followed her husband out into the

West Court. Night was falling fast. She looked at the stars between the low roofs of the pavilions and experienced, very vaguely, the sensation of the prisoner who contemplates the sky between the bars. She refused to be a victim to that sad feeling and, holding on to her husband's arm, forced herself to anticipate the first meal she was going to share with her Chinese relatives.

Before they entered the house of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, Ho Chung stopped short in his tracks and whispered to his wife :

"I had forgotten to tell you that, this evening after dinner, Elder Brother is going to take us all into the central pavilion, where we will see the little altar and the tablets of our ancestors, which we will honour according to the custom. And then he will show us the very wonderful coffin he has ordered for our venerable grandfather of Hangchow. The coffin is even more wonderful than that which our defunct father bought for himself. I just wanted to tell you."

Paulette had trembled at the mention of the word "coffin." Ho Chung tried to comfort her :

"Please don't be frightened, my little wife—I've already told you of the custom—and, now you're going to see for yourself. It's a magnificent coffin. It cost over fifteen hundred dollars! And Elder Brother has already reserved the services of the best geomancer of the Chekiang, so that he'll find a suitable grave for our grandfather when he dies."

"Oh, darling, please don't talk of such ghastly things before dinner!"

“ Ghastly ? Why ghastly ? Ah, yes, because you Europeans always speak of a coffin. We call it ‘ the boards of old age.’ That’s far more poetic, don’t you think so ? ”

CHAPTER VIII

THUS SPAKE FA-JOU, THE PRIESTESS

MADAME LOVELY-TORTURE was alone in her apartments. Seated on a low cushion in front of a dressing-table from Ning Po, of red lacquer lined with gold, her black tresses tied back behind her neck, she was removing hairs. Her face was insensible to the pain, because she had rubbed it with white of egg. The charming girls of H'an who, for the most part, have never heard of occidental beauty products and would despise such chemical concoctions if they ever did see them, assure the purity of their complexions with plain white of egg, which they allow to dry on their skin.

Madame Lovely-Torture was manipulating a thread like a tiny lasso. Holding it in her two hands, she manœuvred it until she caught a superfluous hair which she promptly extracted. This was a slow and delicate process which required both skill and patience. But is not Time one of those deceptive divinities which we of the West worship in our machine-made Olympus?

Madame Lovely-Torture was not one of those occidentalised Chinese for whom time is money, who import their perfumes from France, who copy the American chorus girls in the night-clubs of Shanghai, who drink cocktails and study fashion magazines

with a view to altering the classic cut of their national attire. She had been born in Nankin, she had never frequented any foreign devils, she represented the unspoiled beauty of her country and, in heart and mind, she stood for the best Chinese traditions.

She was, therefore, superstitious. Everything to do with sorcery interested her. It was even rumoured in the house of the Ho that the mother of Madame Lovely-Torture had been possessed with a fox. This terrifying tale had been bandied about until it had come to the ears of Madame Pearl-of-the-Dragon, Madame Supreme-Good-Luck and Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day. They had listened with horrified expressions and had emitted countless *Hooos* and *Haaas*.

Madame Lovely-Torture's own, natural mother? Absolutely! Her own mother, at the age of forty, on the night of the fifth day of the sixth moon, had suddenly *heard within herself* everything that the fox said and thought. And, in her little house in Nankin, anybody could go and see the crack in the wall by which the fox had entered to take possession of her soul.

Born of such a mother, was it surprising that Madame Lovely-Torture had magic powers? Was she not quite right when she hid the head of a unicorn and the tooth of a tiger under her bed to keep the demons from coming to strangle her at night? Did she not reason wisely when she burned the doctor's prescription and drank it in a cup of almond milk rather than have it filled by the druggist? And, when she refused to allow Ho Ta Wen, the

Elder, to run a brook through her garden, lest the water run away with her good fortune, who would have thought to challenge her wisdom ?

When the lady of Nankin had sold her to Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, she had particularly refrained from eating all the rice her mother had served her before she departed the maternal home for ever. She had left more than half of it in her bowl—her way of expressing the hope that she would never be reduced to poverty. She was firm in her belief that, if a sparrow lit on her roof, she would receive a visit. She would never have consented to live in the pavilion which Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had given her, had she not been allowed to convoke the priests from a Taoist temple who arrived one evening with gongs and bells and made an infernal din in each room to scare away the evil spirits. Naturally, during this noisy ceremony, the other ladies of the family had hermetically sealed their doors and windows so that the terrified demons would not seek refuge in their homes !

* * *

On the day which presently interests us, Madame Lovely-Torture was busily engaged removing hairs. When the white of egg had thoroughly dried and no superfluous fuzz was visible, she clapped her hands. When Apple-Blossom appeared, she asked :

“ Has Fa-Jou arrived ? ”

“ She is awaiting your orders in the courtyard, mistress.”

“ Tell her to come here.”

Fa-Jou was a priestess who had formerly been attached to the cult of the goddess Kwan-In in the

pagoda on the rue Pou Tchen Ché, just beyond the Porte de Chien-Men at Peking. She had been expelled by her sisters because of her irregular practices and had settled on the outskirts of Shanghai where her reputation as a sorceress had brought her a rich clientele.

Madame Lovely-Torture was one of the most faithful of her disciples. She consulted her very often. And, as each prophecy was worth five or six pieces of silver, the exiled priestess was devoted to the favourite of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. Sometimes she gave advice to Madame Lovely-Torture; sometimes she told the Master how to win at games of chance. On this occasion, Madame Lovely-Torture was to question her as to the probable effects of the arrival of that foreign woman in the house. Because, either due to that extraordinary intuitive power of which certain women seem to have the secret or to an unexplainable presentiment, Elder Brother's favourite had very strong doubts about the apparent submission of Brother Two.

The priestess entered. She was as wrinkled as a pear of Tche Fou dried in the sun and, beneath her long black cloak, she carried a chaplet composed of one hundred and eight beads corresponding to the one hundred and eight regions of the Phrabat, the imprint of the sacred foot of Buddha. Madame Lovely-Torture bowed very low before the priestess, had tea served immediately and began to interrogate her without further delay.

Fa-Jou replied with assurance because she had prudently pumped the servants dry of everything they knew before confronting their mistress :

"I am conscious of the presence, not far from here, of a Western woman who has made a long voyage from one of those barbarous lands where the men breathe through holes in their chests, where the women carry their children around on the end of bamboo sticks, where the men have feathers on their arms and ears with such long lobes that they touch the ground when they walk, where there are men with three eyes and cats' claws, where there are men with two faces and who walk backwards——"

Fa-Jou paused. Madame Lovely-Torture had listened, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. And she was not the only one because, hidden behind the curtain, Madame Supreme-Good-Luck and Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day, informed by their servants that the conference was taking place, were all ears. They, too, were curious to know what the priestess thought about the white woman with the yellow hair who spoke no civilised language, not even the popular tongue of Shanghai.

Fa-Jou continued :

"I can see a member of our race who is being influenced by that foreigner. And her influence will be bad for him——"

"But what about me ? " the favourite asked.

The priestess stretched forth her two bony hands, dry and hard as elephant hide, and placed her fingers on the pretty head with its glossy black hair. She mumbled some incomprehensible words before she added :

"Never touch her ! Evil is on her skin, on her body ! "

There was a piercing cry from behind the curtain.

Madame Lovely-Torture turned around in astonishment. Madame Supreme-Good-Luck, beside herself with fear, threw herself at the priestess' feet and exclaimed :

" She almost touched my babies ! *Hooo !* My poor babies ! They were terrified and they hid themselves in my skirts. Oh, my venerable mother, do tell me what is going to happen ! "

" Did she actually touch them ? "

" No—almost ! "

" In that case, everything will be all right—I have always seen in the Silver River (The Milky Way) that all contact with foreign devils is pernicious. But, there must be contact."

Madame Lovely-Torture was more courageous than her sister-in-law. She regained her composure very quickly. She asked :

" Do you advise us to drive her away from the house ? "

Fa-Jou hesitated.

" If you practice any violence on her, you're liable to irritate the wicked devils which are all around her and then there's no telling where they'd go. They might even cover your bodies with ugly black scabs. But, if you will authorise me to purify their witchcraft with daily prayers, then you can deal with her as she deserves."

" I will pay for the prayers," the favourite decided after a short hesitation.

Fa-Jou, beaming with satisfaction, relapsed into another impressive silence. The sound of footsteps came from the garden. Apple-Blossom looked out and announced :

"The Elder Master is coming!"

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, about to go out for a drive, had taken it into his head to pay a brief visit to his well-beloved. He smiled when he saw the priestess and poked a little good-natured fun at his second Madame:

"What! Fa-Jou here? Have you had a bad dream, my sweet flower?"

Although he pretended not to attach much importance to the prophecies of the priestess, he was not completely indifferent. Madame Lovely-Torture explained to him the reason for the consultation.

"It's all account of that woman who came from France with Brother Two."

"And what does Fa-Jou say?"

The priestess suggested:

"It would be an excellent idea to neutralise her presence by reciting incantations."

"And will you attend to that?"

"Willingly."

Ho Ta Wen made a noise like a seal and, burying his hands in his sleeves, said:

"Peuh! Peuh! I don't think she's so terrible as all that. I'd rather have you tell me something about me. I'm going to gamble at Chen's to-night. Am I going to win?"

The priestess stood up. From beside the favourite's bed, she picked up an ivory wand, something like a back-scratcher, pronounced some unintelligible words, placed the wand upright on the rug in the centre of the room and let it fall. It pointed to the north-east, a section of Shanghai

directly opposed to Chen's dive. Ho Ta Wen, who seemed astonished, asked :

"Does that mean that I'd better go to Kung's place instead? He lives in that direction."

"You're bound to win at Kung's," Fa-Jou told him.

"Wait. Here's five dollars for the visit. And, if you've told me the truth, I'll give you five more the next time."

The priestess bowed and decamped. Now the conversation turned from sorcery to other subjects equally interesting for the favourite concubine. The silk merchant had sent two pieces of silk from which to make dresses. One was known as *The flowers fall in the garden* and had the snowy pallor of an April blossom. The other was a blend of violet and silver and was baptised *The crow sleeps at nightfall*. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was in fine good humour. He advised his favourite to buy them both. She thanked him warmly.



Two days later, Paulette returned to her pavilion about five o'clock in the afternoon. She had been on a little shopping tour. It was rare that she left the family house, because her husband was not always at liberty to accompany her and she had yet to learn her way around Shanghai.

She exchanged a few words with one of the guards at the entrance to the park. He was a handsome giant, as blonde as Ceres and as strong as a bull. His name was Leonidoff. He had been an officer in the White armies in Siberia. A victim of the revolution, tortured by the Kirghizes, who had

chopped off three fingers of his left hand, he had found refuge in Harbin, where he had begged for a living until he had found work laying rails for the Chinese Eastern Railway. For two years now he had been one of the Master's bodyguard, and he was only too happy to have found this sinecure which guaranteed him food and lodging. He spoke French perfectly, and it was a pleasure for Paulette to talk with him, sequestered as she was in this great house where, with the exception of her husband and Perforated-Lotus, no one understood her native language.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Leonidoff," she said as she passed him. "You are on duty to-day?"

"Yes, Madame. We are watching over the precious hide of your honourable brother-in-law."

"Tell me—do all rich Chinese have bodyguards?"

"No. I only know of two. Lord Li, who lives in the French Concession on the Avenue Haig, and our employer here. But they are, if I'm not mistaken, the richest men in the locality."

"But, between us, just what do you accomplish? The Kiangsu is in a state of peace."

"There is no peace for Chinese millionaires, who are easy prey for the brigands. Last year, we escorted your brother-in-law on a visit he made to a friend in the north of the International Concession. His automobile was set upon by cut throats. We managed to drive them off, thanks to our revolvers, but not before one of our comrades had been killed!"

"Still, my brother-in-law doesn't seem to be in any danger now——"

The Russian giant nodded doubtfully and said:

"*That's not his opinion, because he's instructed us to be on the lookout every minute. Yesterday, he received a warning from one of his Chinese friends. It advised him to run no risks. And, because the influential Chinese have wonderful secret sources of information, we keep our eyes peeled. But, whatever happens, Madame you can sleep tight. We're always on the job.*"

Comforted more by the huge stature of the Slav than by what he had told her, Paulette went to her pavilion. To her great surprise, she heard women's voices within. She tiptoed through her husband's room and pecked between the curtains. In her own bedroom, she saw her three sisters-in-law: Madame Pearl-of-the-Dragon, Madame Supreme-Good-Luck and Madame Beautiful-Bright-Day. They were kneeling around her open trunk. Her servant, Perforated-Lotus, was showing them her stockings, her *lingerie*, her dresses and her toilet articles. Each object was meticulously examined by each of the three ladies and each one offered her personal opinion. They smelled of the contents of every jar and bottle, tried a few drops of eau de Cologne, played with the tube of tooth-paste, sniffed at the face cream and the rouge. Whenever they were in doubt about anything, Perforated-Lotus was ready with a detailed explanation, for she had been in the employ of barbarians from the West. She demonstrated how the atomizer worked; she opened the compartments of the vanity case; she produced the imitation pearls, which were in a horseshoe shaped handbag which was greatly appreciated by the Chinese ladies.

Paulette was amused, and thinking to help her maid to satisfy the curiosity of her sisters-in-law, she calmly walked into the room. Her arrival was greeted with exclamations. The ladies jumped up while Perforated-Lotus, who was very much embarrassed, stammered :

“ Pardon, Madame. You no cross because me show all this, all that for Madames Chinoises. Much culious, Madames, savaz ! ”

“ But it doesn't matter a bit. Tell them they can see all my other things if they want to.”

The three inquisitive ladies had already reached the threshold. Paulette, smiling amiably, held out her hands to show them that they were welcome. They were so afraid that she might touch them that a casual observer would have been convinced that she had leprosy. They mumbled excuses and disappeared. Paulette was desperately unhappy. She did her best to be agreeable and not one of them seemed to want to have anything to do with her. She confided her troubles to Perforated-Lotus, who replied :

“ Madames Chinoises no want touch you. Madame Bonze come tell them no touch you. Madame Bonze talky-talky beaucoup Madame Noumelo Deux——”

Perforated-Lotus whispered to Paulette :

“ No can do touch Madames Chinoises. If touch then Madames catchy skin all black, black like ink. No good ! Madame Bonze she talky like that——”

Paulette was more upset than ever. More absurd superstitions ! She asked Perforated-Lotus :

" But you, are you afraid to touch me ? Don't you want to work for me ? "

The servant laughed delightedly and, with a very superior air, cried :

" Me ? Me, why no can do touch Madame ? Me ? Me no afraid. Me, when see bad devils, me do like Anamese boy. Me cly vely loud : You plomenade avec moa ! And bad devils afraid and go way ! "

Having thus described her contempt for superstitions, Perforated-Lotus set to work to put her mistress' trunk in order. But, when she was sure that Paulette was not watching, she touched the tiger's tooth which she always wore under her dress. Now that she had touched the tooth, the priestess Fa-Jou could not possibly do her any harm that night, not even if she heard by some evil spirit that Perforated-Lotus had scoffed at her most solemn prophecies.

CHAPTER IX

OLD UNCLE—I WANT A NEW PAIR OF SHOES

HO CHUNG was pacing back and forth in the West Court, a scowl upon his forehead, his fists clenched in his flowing sleeves. Noiselessly, he walked up and down the path, bordered with spindle trees and balsams. He appeared to be deep in meditation. He might have been composing a poem to be designed in pretty characters on a long sheet of that soft Chinese paper which is like a caress to the fingers of the true dilettante.

The fact was that he was possessed by a cold rage, one of those all-consuming rages which determine desperate acts. Once again, Paulette had been insulted in the family home and, what made matters worse, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had approved of the outrage.

During the month that they had been living in the West Court, not only had no intimacy sprung up between his Chinese relatives and his French wife, but the neutrality of the Chinese women had turned to hostility so open that Paulette's existence in the pavilion was rapidly becoming impossible.

To begin with, she had been given the left-over for her kitchen: rice which smelled of dead grass, fish half-devoured by the flies, a duck which starving coolies would have refused to eat. After that the

sisters-in-law had indulged in vulgar mockery, snickering and whispering whenever she passed close to them.

And, finally, Madame Lovely-Torture had been surprised by Perforated-Lotus in the act of putting a black drug in Paulette's tea, a drug which, according to the servant, would have given her mistress a frightful attack of indigestion, but would have paralyzed the evil influence of the demons. Paulette, warned just in time, had retaliated by spilling the contents of her cup all over the dress of Madame Lovely-Torture, who had chanced to be standing outside her door in the Court of the Sycamores. The concubine, like an offended queen, had called the entire household to witness, the women, the children, Tsioun, the little girl, Sun, the little boy, Liang, the old servant, the widow Tcheng, a toothless old wretch whose task it was to light the fires, and the fat Ko, who did the washing for Madame The Mother. When Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had been summoned to settle the dispute between Paulette and the Second Madame, he had defended his favourite, while Ho Chung had declared that he would not tolerate this lack of respect for his wife.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had concluded sarcastically :

" Oh ! Your wife ! Yes, your wife ! But not much longer, little brother. Don't forget your promise ! "

Suddenly reminded of hard realities, Ho Chung had controlled his fury in the interests of his secret mission. But his resentment against his elder brother and his concubine was fiercer than ever and,

although peace and quiet reigned once more in the house, his anger boiled within him until he thought he could not bear it another day.

He was pacing back and forth patiently enough, for this was the day of the week and the hour when the old cobbler was accustomed to pass. Fortunately for him, he was not dependent for his rice on the shoes he was given to re-sole, but was, in reality, the messenger between Ho Chung and Teng Fah.

Ho Chung did not have long to wait. He heard the cobbler's voice in the next court, where a servant gave him a pair of slippers to repair. Shortly, he entered the West Court and humbly offered his services to Ho Chung, who quickly pronounced the words agreed upon :

" Old uncle—I want a new pair of shoes."

The shoemaker's expression did not change as he muttered :

" Come with me, comrade. But follow at a distance. I will wait for you at the corner of Columbia Road and the Avenue Jordan."

Ho Chung went out by the main entrance, where the guard on duty saluted him. He soon spied his guide and tracked him at a hundred yards. It was a long walk. They followed the Zikawei river around the French Concession and were lost in the network of narrow streets in the Chinese city, between the pagoda, the little lake and the bird market. Ho Chung finally entered a dirty-looking house on the ground floor of which two skilled workmen were carving and colouring mahjong sets.

Teng Fah was there. Seated as he was in the

half-light of this low-ceilinged room, he looked for all the world like a big spider between two beams. And, like the spider, he spun his web each week in a different section of Shanghai. Never did he fail to glean valuable information.

When the tea was served, the chief ordered :

" Give me your report."

" Unfortunately," Ho Chung told him, " it is not yet complete. Every week, I hope to be able to give you precise details and, every week, I am hindered by the suspicions of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. And that reminds me that one of his Russian guards informed my wife that my brother has been warned to be on the lookout."

" That doesn't surprise me. Du She Wei has heard of our intentions and he seems to be disinclined to comply with our request. He will be making a great mistake if he persists in his resistance, because he is no longer as influential as he was. But what have you discovered about your elder brother ? "

" For one thing, I have done the impossible to get him to talk. And he stubbornly refuses to take me into his confidence. The same thing is true of Hsu, his secretary, whose principal occupation is to handle his financial operations. But I can certify that my brother has funds both in the Shanghai Commercial Bank and the Anglo-Chinese Bank."

" That is a useful tip. I can ascertain the amount of his credit easily enough. But his fortune is not all there by any means."

" No. He distrusts even the best banks. I know that he has a quantity of American dollars,

piasters, francs, pounds and florins. All that treasure is hidden somewhere in his house. But where ? ”

“ There is only one infallible way to find out. Set fire to some rubbish not far from his house and watch every move he makes. When a man keeps his gold under his roof, he will forget his own wife in his hurry to rescue it. You must try this scheme without delay, because I’ve already made my plans and I must have the necessary information before Tuesday. Because next Tuesday there is to be a big dance at the Paramount, in the French Concession. All the profits are to go for Chinese charities. The Europeans will be there in their most elegant robes, and the Chinese women will wear costumes representing various epochs in our history. I know that both your brothers, with all their families, will attend this gala. Consequently, the residence will be practically deserted from nine until at least midnight. We can take advantage of the occasion to search the premises.”

“ We ? Who do you mean ? ”

“ You and I. You will let me in when the way is clear.”

“ But what if my brother invites my wife and me to accompany him ? ”

“ In that case, send your wife along with the others and say that you have a previous engagement. And, about the fire, on second thoughts I suggest that you pour some petrol in a thin line about a yard from the wall. That will make a pretty curtain of flame which will alarm the on-lookers, without endangering the building.”

Teng Fah indulged in a smile which was strangely like a grimace and concluded :

" Because we would be heartbroken were we to burn up the fortune which your honourable Elder Brother is guarding so carefully in his home. His gold is almost as precious to us as it is to him."

The interview was at an end. Ho Chung stood up. Teng Fah added :

" When the fire is blazing properly, the cobbler, who will have been watching the house day and night, will rush in to help extinguish it. If, at that time, you have noticed something of interest, you can tell him "

Ho Chung departed. He was happy to work under this chief, who seemed to have confidence in him and to appreciate his culture. The thought that his elder brother would be heavily taxed for the great Cause and that he would thus be deprived of thousands of dollars which would otherwise be gambled away or squandered by his concubine delighted him in advance. He took a ricksha and returned home. His anger was assuaged because his vengeance was near. After all, what greater satisfaction in this world than to punish the man who has humiliated us and, at the same time, render a great service to the political cause to which we are devoted ?

He timed his euphony with the trot of the coolie along the road. In his mind of a highly educated Oriental, who places the ancestral poetry beside the imperious logic of the Europeans in his brain, in that brain divided into compartments where Poan

Kou, the first man of Chinese legend, is a neighbour of the protoplasm of the Occidental biologist ; where the primitive call of the night watch : " Look out ! Robbers ! I'm coming ! " has for an echo the Bertillon system and dactyloscopy ; where the kite of Tchang Liang which flew to Heaven two hundred years before the Christian era finds itself rivalled by the stratospheric balloon ; in that brain where two civilisations dance to different music ; more exactly where the right lobe functions by the principle of acceleration, whereas the left lobe is satisfied with its innate inertia ; in that tortured brain torn between science and atavism it was extremely difficult to strike a happy medium which would act as a League of Nations pleading for peace.

But Ho Chung had his port in a storm. It consisted of his passion for poetry. All that was active and material and practical in him was counter-balanced by the poet. If a famous general amused himself by playing with cats between two great battles, Ho Chung did even better—he not only found distraction but sheer contentment in composing verses.

Already, seated in the ricksha which rolled noiselessly along while the coolie panted rhythmically, Ho Chung had in mind a short poem. With the index finger of his right hand, he wrote in the palm of his left hand :

*" The sky weeps
The softest tears
On the gold carpet of the autumn——"*

And that reminded him of the famous verses of Tsong Po Houa :

*" The white snow
The dead leaves
Cover this world——"*

But he did not want to be influenced by this involuntary reminiscence and he sought for something quite different. He was still searching when the scraping of the shafts on the ground and the position of the ricksha brought him back to earth.

Because he was feeling very much relieved, he gave an extra five cents to the coolie and walked rapidly through the main entrance. The gigantic Leonidoff was on duty. They bowed cordially to one another. As he crossed the West Court, he thought about Leonidoff. That Russian guard was the only human being, with the exception of Perforated-Lotus, who had been agreeable and kindly to Paulette. And the irony of fate had selected a White Russian, a victim of Bolshevist horrors, to go out of his way to be friendly to the French wife of a Chinese Communist.

When he entered his room, he was surprised to hear someone sobbing just beyond the wall. Could Paulette have been suddenly taken ill? He rushed into her bedroom. She was stretched out on the bed, fully dressed. She was not ill, she was unhappy. The scene she had had that morning with Madame Lovely-Torture had shattered her nerves. She was crying her eyes out, like an abandoned child. He took her two hands in his and kissed them.

"Oh! My little sweetheart of the springtime! Are you in pain?"

"No! No, dear. But, I'm sad, so sad—I'm desperate. What have I done to them that they should treat me so!"

"Oh, sweetheart, please! If that's why you're unhappy, it's not so serious as I feared. What does it matter about them? Don't you still love me?"

"Oh! Dearest!"

"And you're always going to be my wonderful little wife?"

Paulette put her arms about him and hugged him tight. Ho Chung was her only consolation, her only hope in this horrid country where, as the days passed, she felt more and more lost and helpless.

"Without you, Loulou, what would become of me?"

"No, don't you go and get all worked up about nothing! Everything's going to be all right. Really it is——"

And he continued to reassure her. He used the words Paulette had heard from infancy in the Latin Quarter. It was touching. It showed, too, that Ho Chung understood his wife even though she was not of his race. By his sympathy, couched in terms which reminded her of her native land, he quickly remedied her despair. Bending over her, he murmured with a prophetic gesture:

"You'll see, my little wife. My brother's Number Two? Well, I promise you that she'll pay for this one of these days——"

Paulette, won over by his optimism, stopped

crying. She embraced her husband tenderly and, had she thought aloud, she would have cried :

" Oh, God, how good he is, my little Chung ! "

Now that his wife was herself again, Ho Chung was glad and, sitting on the edge of her bed, he said to her, as if he had been confiding a great secret :

" Listen, sweetheart. I've just commenced a poem entitled—— Wait a moment. How can I translate it so that you will understand ? Ah ! I have it : '*The Oriole sings on the little green willow.*' "

CHAPTER X

A WHITE AND YELLOW GALA

THE big dance hall of the *Paramount* was packed to bursting. The best white society of Shanghai was mingling with the Chinese gentry, the most advanced representatives of the yellow republic, the bankers, the business men, even ministers from Nankin. Their wives were with them. They all spoke English as fluently as if it had been their native tongue, and a casual observer would have been readily convinced that the Europeanisation of the China of Sun Yat Sen was already an accomplished fact.

Occidentals and Orientals communed over champagne and sandwiches, while the *decolleté* gowns from Paris fraternised with the beautiful and chaste robes of elegant ladies with oblique eyes.

This charity gala was the most important event of the season. Business men from the Bund, English and Americans who daily compared their accents, their pipes and their cigars while they sipped Martinis in the famous Shanghai bar, importers of cigarettes, exporters of silk, munition merchants and managers of insurance companies had deserted for this evening the *Little Club* and the fascinating Russian women of *Del Monte*.

The entertainment began with an exhibition of historic costumes offered by the white lionesses of

All-Shanghai. A charming young Italian with the profile of a cameo presented for the benefit of the Chinese the frail virginities of Tanagra; a proud Australian, known in the colony as the Empress of the Kangaroos, appeared as Marie Antoinette; a Cuban personified Catherine of Russia; a German resuscitated Mary Stuart. It was the confusion of races and of handbooks of history. Then, Madame Li Sit Fong, the celebrated Cantonese soprano, inaugurated the Chinese programme by singing the death of Tai Yu, the tragic heroine of the *Dream of the Red Room*. After that there was the parade of the great ladies of Shanghai which greatly delighted the European element which had never before seen them take part in theatrical displays. Madame H. S. Wong was the first on the list. She played the rôle of the famous favourite, Shi Shih, who drowned herself rather than betray her country; Madame Pan followed her as Chao Chun, the imperial concubine who, under the Han dynasty, was given the mission of taming the Turkish invader; then came Madame Kay Chun as Yang Kwei Fei, the most beautiful woman in Chinese history, who started an uprising and was condemned to death, crushed beneath the imperial chariot; last of all there was Madame Elsie Soong as Mul An, the Chinese Joan of Arc.

They all displayed a gracefulness of poise, a harmony of movement and a general charm which aroused the envy of the amazed European women.

Seated quietly around their table, the ladies of the house of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, watched the parade in silence. Paulette, who, like her husband,

had been invited by her brother-in-law, had accepted despite the marked hostility of the other women. Her life was so lonely and so devoid of all amusement that she had preferred to brave the frigid airs of her sisters-in-law than to miss this opportunity to go out. Ho Chung was not present. He had excused himself because of an engagement for a game of *ma tsiang* with a friend.

Madame Lovely-Torture was the only one who had any comments to make. The younger brother and the other women looked on and said nothing. When Madame H. S. Wong appeared, personifying the favourite Shi Shih, Madame Lovely-Torture proved to Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, that she was versed in theatrical matters.

"Peuh!" she scoffed. "Look at her left arm. She holds it as rigid as a stick——"

"Really!" said Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. "I believe you're right——"

And he turned in the direction of his brother and the other women by way of calling them to witness the intelligence of his favourite.

When Miss Lily Liang came forward as Tung Fang, the concubine who, in the famous play, marries her husband's murderer, Madame Lovely-Torture scored a veritable triumph.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! As for that—why, that's not it at all! I played the rôle of Tung Fang in *Hung Ni Kuan*—with my great master, Shang Hsiao Yun. That woman doesn't know her classics! Why, she has no idea of the part!"

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was very proud of this criticism from the pretty lips of his Second Madame.

He again turned to his neighbours and, as before, obtained no sign of approbation.

Now, other Chinese ladies gave a fashion display. The very thin and graceful Madame Li Tsu Fa showed a ravishing costume of a Sing Song Girl of Souchow of 1880. But, when the charming Madame Alice Chung appeared as a Chinese bride of 1900, something happened which no one had foreseen. An employee came to tell Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, that someone desired to speak to him immediately at the door of the *Paramount*. He exchanged a knowing glance with Madame Lovely-Torture and hurried down the stairs as fast as his legs would carry his fat body. In the main entrance he saw one of his bodyguards. There were always three on duty when he went out at night. One sat beside the chauffeur and the other two escorted the automobile on mounted motor cycles. The Russian guards whispered a few words in Chinese.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, started perceptibly and bellowed :

" You stay here. You can guard the family. They will come home later. Order the car at once. I am going straight to the house."

* *

It was a quarter to nine when Ho Chung pleaded a game of ma tsiang with a friend so as not to be obliged to go with the others to the *Paramount*.

He helped his wife and the other ladies into the two automobiles which were waiting, and then made as if to return slowly to the West Court.

What he actually did was to make a tour of inspection in the shadowy park. He passed all

the pavilions and the guard house where he saw Leonidoff and one of his comrades bending over a chessboard. They had nothing to watch since their master and his family had gone off escorted by the other Russians. It occurred to Ho Chung that it would be a good idea to say something to the blonde giant. He called out:

"Oh, Leonidoff. If you see a Chinese come in, don't be surprised. I'm expecting a friend for a game of ma tsiang."

"Very well, Master Ho Chung—I'll let him pass."

Ho Chung then entered his elder brother's house and was relieved to find that the servants had retired. Only old Liang and the cook were gossiping at the back of the Court of the Sycamores. By the flickering light of a lantern, they were eating bamboo shoots cooked in salt.

Teng Fah had assuredly chosen a propitious evening to make his investigations.

At nine-thirty, Ho Chung, as had been arranged with the chief, opened the little door which gave on a vacant property and then, seated on the threshold of the West Court, waited patiently. The chief had been provided with a detailed plan of the courts and the pavilions. He was certain to have little or no difficulty, even in the darkness, in finding his way.

And, in verity, it was not long before Ho Chung heard steps so light that the gravel scarcely crunched. He stood up and made out Teng Fah, whom he led at once into his bedroom. The chief of the Communist Secret Police said to him:

"We have at least two hours in which to work.

Let's hope that will be sufficient. If I correctly understood the cobbler's message, the make-believe fire served its purpose? "

" Yes. I followed your instructions to the letter. The minute my brother saw the flames he called his guards and posted them around the left wing of the house. This was done even before all the servants had been called out to extinguish the fire with buckets of water. So I think that we can safely conclude that that is where he keeps his treasure."

" Are you sure that Hsu is not in the house? "

" The secretary? He has gone to the *Paramount* with the others."

" Then, let's get to work. Show me the way."

Noiselessly, they entered the house of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. They crossed the dining-room and the winter saloon. From there, they had access to the left wing, which was composed of two ground floor rooms where Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, usually received his visitors. There was a big black table covered with cakes of India ink, vases bristling with brushes made of boars' whiskers, sheets of silk and rice paper; there were several bamboo chairs, piles of documents and the bead counter indispensable to all Chinese accountants for the verification of their additions and subtractions. The walls were lined high with stacks of papers.

Teng Fah wasted no time in this first room. Ho Chung asked him:

" Don't you think it would be a good idea to examine some of those folders? "

" No. What we're after is in the next room."

"But? How do you know that?"

"Hsu told me."

Ho Chung stopped on the threshold and stared at Teng Fah in complete bewilderment. The chief continued:

"There have been developments since you carried out your part of the work. I was afraid that, even with your information and three hours at our disposal, we might search in vain. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, is not so stupid as he looks. So I decided to hear what Hsu would have to say on the subject. Everything passed off pleasantly yesterday afternoon. My men followed him when he came out of a bank and, pretending that they desired to consult him on a matter of importance to his employer, they invited him on board a sampan beyond the concession and out of range of the guns of the foreign cruisers anchored in the Whangpoo. Hsu thought he was going to meet the leader of an opium ring and you can imagine his surprise when he saw me."

"And then what happened?"

"And then we induced Hsu to reveal the whereabouts of his employer's treasure."

"You mean he betrayed my brother's interests?"

"No. He wanted to breathe, that's all. Hah! Hah!"

Teng Fah's harsh laugh was far more eloquent than a long description.

"He wanted to breathe?"

"Of course he did! And he knew that to breathe there was just one thing for him to do—speak! When two heavy weights pinion your arms

and hold your head in the muddy water of the Whangpoo, you may be silent as the grave for twenty or thirty seconds, but you finally decide that you'd better avoid a second dip longer than the first and a third dip which is likely to be fatal. I had an interview in Hangkow with a traitor who held out until there was scarcely any sand left in the glass. But he was an exception. He had been a pearl diver in Japan! Anyway, our young friend Hsu dislikes dirty water and, just between us, he impressed me as being about as brave as the bastard son of a sheep with a mule for a father. It didn't take him long to tell me what I wanted to know. I won't need to make any inquiries in the banks. I know, to a dollar, how much money Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, has on deposit and I'm about to show you where that very prudent business man keeps the rest of his riches."

"But Hsu! You let him go?"

"Certainly and not without offering my apologies for having given him a ducking. What's more, I'm sure that we shall be able to congratulate him on his discretion. Our young friend Hsu knows very well that, if he blurts out a single word with reference to what happened yesterday afternoon, he will receive, within twenty-four hours, a knife between the shoulders which will forever prevent him from enjoying his rice or his favourite game of Houa K'uen!"

Teng Fah now entered the second room which resembled rather a parlour than an office designed for the transaction of business. There were some very pretty pieces of furniture of carambola wood,

some old statues of the H'an dynasty, some fans painted by a concubine of the Emperor Kien Long and a smoker's set of ivory inlaid with lapis-lazuli and jade. The room was worthy of a collector of rare bibelots.

"And is the safe here?" Ho Chung whispered.

"Yes. There are four in all, one in each corner. To open them, you have only to push a button in the frieze, which is of sculptured pine-cones and lotus leaves. We started by counting four pine-cones to the west. One, two, three, four—— Here we are."

Teng Fah set in motion some invisible mechanism which ticked like a clock and, suddenly, a panel slipped slowly to the level of the floor, disclosing a sort of cupboard which contained a box of hard wood.

"Hsu is a man of his word," Teng Fah remarked as he pulled the box towards him. "He objects to dirty water, but he never tells a lie!"

"But how are you going to open the box?"

"Oh! I'd forgotten to tell you that! We had only to tap Hsu's neck two or three times in such a way as to cause his head to go under water and he came up with the combination. These boxes do not open with keys but with silver dollars." He produced a coin from his pocket. "All we have to do is to insert this dollar in the slit under the cover. At a given point it completes a contact and the electric mechanism inside automatically opens the cover. And this contact is established on the east side of the box. Let us see whether our friend Hsu has told the truth again."

The chief slipped the dollar into the narrow slit on the right side and, sure enough, there was a metallic click. Now it only remained to raise the cover. The box was bursting with banknotes tied in bundles and carefully classified.

"Excellent," said Teng Fah. "We can now proceed without difficulty to estimate the fortune of our 'spontaneous donor.' Take a pencil and paper and write down these figures: ten packages of 5,000 pounds = 50,000 pounds; ten packages of 10,000 florins = 100,000 florins; ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty packages each containing 2,000 American dollars = 120,000 American dollars. Calculate roughly what that makes in our money."

"About a million and a half Shanghai dollars."

"Good. Now let's put back all this money carefully because one should always respect the property of one's fellow citizen and let's get on with our job. Your brother has about eight millions in various banks so that, if each one of these boxes contains another million and a half, he is worth around fourteen millions in cash. Under those circumstances, he can easily afford a million and a half for our cause—for the time being!"

Teng Fah appeared to be thoroughly satisfied with the result of his investigations. He painstakingly replaced the sliding panel and took Ho Chung into a second corner, where he repeated the same operation. He worked rapidly and with just enough light to permit Ho Chung to write down the figures as he read them on the neat little bundles. There was no other sound than the rustle of the

banknotes which was similar to that of a butterfly caught between a window and a curtain.

Suddenly, Ho Chung put his hand on his chief's arm. He was certain that he had heard a noise outside. They quickly extinguished their lantern. Ho Chung tiptoed to the vestibule and looked out into the courtyard. He saw no one because he had arrived too late to spy Leonidoff who, making his rounds, had noticed a light in the left wing. The Russian had vainly tried to open the door which Ho Chung had locked from within. Not certain as to what course to pursue, he had decided that he could do no better than to inform Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, without delay. Since the fire, for which no one had been able to give a plausible explanation, the Master had ordered that he be informed of everything out of the ordinary, no matter how unimportant.

Ho Chung returned to the room where the treasure was stored.

"Did you see anyone?" Teng Fah questioned.

"No. The two Russian guards have gone to bed. Nobody can have any idea that we're here."

"All right. Let's get on with it."

They took the inventory of two more boxes. Each one contained approximately the same sum.

"What time is it?" the chief asked.

"Almost eleven!"

"Excellent! We still have more than enough time] to count every cent that belongs to your honourable brother who does not yet know that he is a philanthropist. Only one more box to examine!"

Teng Fah had no more than pushed the button near the fourth pine-cone than he distinctly heard the noise of a motor. The gravel crunched as the chauffeur brought the car to a sudden stop. Ho Chung whispered excitedly :

"That's my brother! Chief! Hurry! This way!"

And he pushed Teng Fah into the first room, where a little door gave on the Court of the Sycamores. This was a special exit which allowed Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, to smoke a pipe or chat with Madame Lovely-Torture between two serious interviews. Teng Fah disappeared into the night just as Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, arrived panting, ready to have his guards mow down with their machine guns the robbers who had entered his house. The sight of Ho Chung in his office stopped him in his tracks. He stood there on the threshold, gasping for breath, swaying back and forth, great drops of perspiration running in little rivers over the greasy skin of his fat face.

CHAPTER XI

BROTHERS SWORN ENEMIES

"WHAT are you doing here ? "

" I finished my game of ma tsiang a little while ago and I came in here to get some ink and a good brush to compose a poem."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, suspicious by nature, motioned to his guards to stay where they were while he went into the second room, his head thrust forward, his brows turned down around his eyes. He had arrived at the very moment when Teng Fah, having verified the contents of three boxes, was about to examine the fourth and last. Three of the sliding panels were in their proper places, but the fourth was lowered to the floor, exposing the telltale hiding place in the wall.

And this incriminating detail did not escape the attention of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, who, instinctively took in the four corners of the room with a rapid glance. He pointed to the opening and cried in a fury :

" That ! That ! Who did that ? You did ! "

Ho Chung was not long to reply. Everything was against him. But he could not think of trying to save his own skin by denouncing the Chief of the Communist Secret Police who had been lucky enough to escape in the nick of time. Therefore, he admitted :

"Yes. I opened that."

"Thief! Bandit! You were going to take my money!"

"I had no such idea. If you don't believe me, look for yourself."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, bent down, saw that the box was in its proper place and that the cover was closed as usual. But that failed to reassure him. He scolded:

"You didn't take anything because you didn't have time! Just the same, you intended to rob me!"

"No! And the proof is that everything is just where it ought to be——"

"Then why did you open that sliding panel?"

"I didn't even know it existed. My curiosity was aroused by that frieze of sculptured wood which is most unusual and which I had never particularly noticed before. Running my hand over it, I touched one of the pine-cones and the lotus leaves beside it, and you can imagine my surprise when one of the petals moved beneath my finger."

"Your surprise! You weren't surprised at all!"

"Pardon me, but I was. I saw the panel slide away and it suddenly dawned on me that I had probably happened on a secret cupboard which you used for hiding valuables."

Ho Ta Wen's fat face was convulsed with rage. He literally exploded:

"Do you take me for the village idiot or a child in diapers? Since you've been living under my roof, you've had any number of opportunities to satisfy any natural curiosity in my presence. And,

never once have you so much as commented on that frieze. But, when you know that the whole family is going out for the evening, you pretend that you're going to stay at home and play ma tsiang! And the truth is that you intended to rob me!"

"I tell you that I have never dreamed of robbing you——"

"I'm going to have my guards turn you over to the Chinese police!"

"Because I inadvertently pushed a button hidden in the sculptured wood on your wall?"

Ho Chung tried to free himself from the grasp of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, whose fingers were tearing the silk of his robe. And suddenly he sneered:

"And you? What about you? Are you worthy of the honourable name you bear? You! You presume to talk to me of honour! You make me laugh! Where is your honour? In the drug which you and your accomplices sell at prohibitive prices?"

"I forbid you to accuse me! Drug? What drug?"

"Don't play the fool! Don't you suppose all Shanghai knows that the millions you squander at the gaming tables come from the drug traffic?"

"Whatever business I do is strictly honest!"

"Our honourable father would blush with shame if he could know that you had gambled away his fortune and that you were making more fortunes out of opium!"

"Will you be quiet! Scum of the earth! Criminal! When I think that you dare preach virtue to me! You who are married to a horrible white barbarian and who can't earn your living with

all your diplomas and who sneak around my house at night hoping to lay your hands on something you can sell! Now I see what you've been up to all this time! Now I understand why you're for ever asking questions about matters which don't concern you! Now I see that your curiosity is not the result of any love of art! Now I know who started that fire the other day! This time, you've opened my eyes! And I know what I'm going to do with you and that vile female you brought home from France!"

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, suddenly let go of his brother's sleeve. He had heard an automobile entering the courtyard. Then there were women's voices and hurried footsteps. The entire family had come home from the *Paramount*, having been ordered to return by Madame Lovely-Torture, who had been disturbed by her Master's abrupt departure.

Paulette understood less than nothing of what she saw. What had happened? Why this haste? Had her husband met with an accident? When she got out of the motor, she sighed with relief to find Ho Chung alive and well. She ran to him while the younger brother and all the other women gathered around Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. But the latter waved them away and, assuming the attitude of the judge pronouncing the death sentence on a murderer, he exclaimed:

"I discovered this man who is of my blood at the very moment when he was about to break into my strong boxes—I arrived in time to prevent the robbery. I could have him arrested and sent to

prison, but the eagle does not seek its prey in its own nest. What's more, I would not want it to be said that a son of Ho Kung Li was a thief. Therefore, I am going to punish him myself before all of you. I order him to leave the family house immediately and to take his woman with him. Do you hear me? You are not fit to live another minute in our midst. That is my formal order! Go!"

Ho Chung had listened to this speech in silence, but his nails had dug deep into the palms of his hands. He suffered terribly in his pride and in his dignity. He suffered for himself and for Paulette, who, although she did not understand the purport of this oration in Chinese, sensed that something dreadful was taking place. But he suffered most of all because he was humiliated before her, before his relatives, before the servants who had come running and even before the Russian guards who were gathered in the courtyard. He had a wild desire to take his elder brother by the throat and shake him until he took back his accusations and apologised. But he still had sufficient presence of mind to see that that would do no good. He could never establish his innocence, no matter what he said or did. There was nothing for it, then, but to leave the paternal home at once. He had accomplished his mission. His chief had escaped unseen and unsuspected. That was the essential thing. The discipline of the Cause imposed upon him this sacrifice—the most terrible of all sacrifices for a Chinese: to lose his dignity before his equals, his inferiors and, above all, before white people.

"Come, Paulette," he murmured, "we must leave immediately."

"But we are being thrown out!"

"I'll explain everything later on."

They quickly went to the West Court, where they hurriedly packed all their belongings. Paulette rushed here and there, trembling, terrified and unable to divine the reason for this unexpected calamity. Her husband was so uncommunicative about some things.

"Did you have an argument with your brother?"

"I will tell you later, Paulette. We must hurry now—I don't want to stay under his roof another minute. Close your trunks and bags. We'll send for them to-morrow. For the time being, we must go from here!"

At last, they were ready, and they crossed the courtyards to find the entire family assembled on the front steps of the elder brother's house.

"Walk straight by without stopping," Ho Chung whispered.

Paulette obeyed. She preceded her husband. She did not glance to right or left. Suddenly and quite without warning, Madame Lovely-Torture took two quick short steps forward and spit in the face of the Frenchwoman. Paulette cried out and was about to hurl herself at the sneering concubine when she felt her husband's hand like an iron clasp about her wrist. He ordered:

"No! Don't say a word! Later!"

And, turning to Madame Lovely-Torture, who was staring at him with hatred in her eyes, like a

black panther about to claw, he declared, as he made a supreme effort to control his fury :

"There are offences for which one pays even twenty years after. You are only a woman—but you will pay and you will pay very dear for what you have just done. Not now—later !"

He led Paulette out by the big gate of the park just as Leonidoff, at the order of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, approached to lock up for the night. The Russian giant pushed the heavy grill into place and Ho Chung and Paulette, on the sidewalk, stopped to speak to the brave fellow, the only human being who had smiled at them in weeks.

"I hope this doesn't mean good-bye for ever !" Leonidoff called. And he added under his breath : "Remember that, whatever happens, you have a good friend here."

Ho Chung thanked him and walked on beside his wife. When they reached the end of the wall of the park, he turned, looked back at his brother's house and, squeezing Paulette's hand until it hurt, said :

"She spit in your face, my dear little wife—I said nothing. But I give you my word that they will be punished."

The little lantern of a ricksha gleamed in the deserted avenue. Ho Chung hailed it. He argued with the coolie, who finally consented to let them both get in. Paulette sat on her husband's knees. As the coolie broke into a trot, she felt the pressure of Ho Chung's arm about her waist. He held her so tight that she could scarcely breathe. His jaws were set. His eyes were almost closed. And,

suddenly, his voice, a harsh voice which vibrated with the fierceness of his hatred, a voice which Paulette had never heard, spoke into her ear :

" She spit in your pretty face, my little wife. They will be punished—I swear to you—they will be punished ! "

PART II

CHAPTER I

AN ALERT IN SHANGHAI

It was the cocktail hour at the French *Club Sportif*. The lady badminton players had returned to the bar. The English billiard fiends, weary of hammering the red ball with the white ball in the hope of knocking it into one of the six pockets, were leaning over side-cars and commenting on the latest news.

The situation was daily getting worse. A year had passed since Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had chased Ho Chung and Paulette from the family home. The steady progress of the Communist forces which, little by little, were invading the Kiangsu, was a cause of serious worry for the authorities of the concessions. Old residents of Shanghai emptied their glasses appreciatively and recalled previous alarms of a similar nature. The younger crowd talked of the recent Sino-Japanese affair; of the nocturnal disturbances occasioned by the bombardment of Chapei and the forts of the Wosung. Satisfaction had been expressed at the arrival of a French dispatch boat, a light English cruiser and three Japanese destroyers. The waters of the Whangpoo flowed by a veritable chain of warships, the cannons of which, like telescopes without lenses, were all pointed at the Bund. The gunner officers had set to work with their slide rules and the imaginary

trajectories of the shells had already been calculated. It was figured that, if it became necessary, the projectiles would clear the Customs buildings and would burst on the Tsung Zu road, on the outskirts of Greater Shanghai. Another barrage was destined to pass between the façades of the *Métropole* and *Cathay* buildings, rattle the guillotine windows and eventually mow down the Reds who would risk approaching along the Ningpo railway.

At the table of Sallangrin, the representative *des Forges et Aciéries de Saint Ugel*, the discussion was animated. In China, Sallangrin was one of the foremost furnishers of arms and munitions, the happy competitor of *Creusot*, *Skoda*, *Armstrong* and all the other purveyors of death in the most up-to-date and approved fashion. Extremely popular with the Chinese generals, an enormous eater and a terrific drinker, he sold his rifles and machine-guns, glass in hand, with cries of *Kampei!* As the result of a bet, he had provided General Feng with 2,000 rifles, 30,000 grenades and 500,000 cartridges. To win, he had merely been required to down a quart of brandy in the time it takes one of the little sticks of incense, which they light on the base of the statue of Buddha, to burn and, finally, to write in Chinese a famous maxim of Lao Tze.

Having consumed about two-thirds of his bottle, General Feng had collapsed and his brush had traced black zigzags on the paper. Sallangrin's decisive victory, acclaimed by all the officers present, had assured him of the order and the money had been deposited without delay in the *Banque de l'Indochine*.

But this evening he was being taken to account for having armed the Chinese against the Europeans. Monsieur Gominel, professor of the French *lycée* of Shanghai, who thoroughly enjoyed hearing himself talk, was more vehement than any of the others.

"Come now, Sallangrin, you're not going to pretend that you consider your conduct logical and normal? We are a handful of white men at the mercy of an uprising of millions of yellow devils and we are furnishing them with grenades with which they will blow us out of our houses one of these days! Our volunteers for the defence of Shanghai may be mobilised to-morrow, you among them, to stop the drive of the Reds who are coming from the Kiangsi towards the sea, and whom the nationalists have so far been powerless to check. And you, you Sallangrin, will as likely as not be killed at the end of the Avenue Joffre by a bullet made in your factories at Saint-Ugel, a bullet that you have sold them to make a commission of one centime for yourself and to assure your stockholders a twelve per cent. dividend. What would you think of the grocer who sold cyanide along with oil and vinegar to a restaurant owner and then expressed astonishment to find himself dying of poison?"

"I!" exclaimed the secretary of the Club, the delightful and ever-cheerful Commandant Harbellot. "I would say that your grocer had bats in his belfry!"

"My dear fellow! This is a serious matter! Please don't make light of it!"

But Harbellot was incorrigible. Serious matters were for him like a red flag, to a bull, and he insisted:

"Certainly I'll make light of it and I'll laugh at my own funeral because the more fools I see on this earth the more convinced I am that Robinson Crusoe was right. Only, if I could live his adventure I would never go out on a Friday for fear of meeting one of my own kind!"

"Well, it looks pretty black for me!" Sallangrin laughed in his turn. "Gominel accuses me of lack of common sense, imprudence and avarice. And, do you know, my dear professor, I quite agree with you. You are entirely right. But when you cry the truth from the house tops you only prove to us that you are a hopeless optimist or a poet in the moon—which is the same thing. Because you still have faith in logic and common sense. If we French didn't sell guns to the Chinese, do you imagine for a moment that our English, German and American competitors would join our parade for morality? You forget one thing, my good friend, and that is that gold weighs more than blood and that civilised people have never been known to hesitate between a profit and a human life."

"That is a revolting truth!"

"Are not almost all truths rather disagreeable? You know as well as I do that our allies in the war for right and culture—oh, funereal farce!—only maintained hostilities to enrich the man behind the lines. You have to be as stupid as a French or an English voter to have any doubts on that score. The religion of gold with fat profits for a catechism dominates every other sentiment under this sun and always has! Otherwise, the merchants of the allied countries would not have secretly sup-

plied Germany through the medium of neutral countries at the risk of killing their own sons and brothers with the cotton and the metal they furnished to the enemy! And why do you expect the comedy to stop now? We arm the Chinese because money has no odour. If ever the whites of the concessions are massacred with our Model B.C.N. 68 machine guns, all the industrials of Europe will weep bravely on our graves and will laud our heroism as pioneers of civilisation. Because, do not crocodile tears make immortals sprout even from frozen ground?"

Harbellot ordered another round of dry Martinis and remarked:

"My children, you remind me of the doctors of Byzantium who were lost in academic palavers when the enemy was at the gates of their city. To-day, we are all of us right and wrong all at once. Gominel, Sallangrin or I may be stuck through within a week's time by a bayonet made in France. But we will always have the consolation as we depart this valley of tears of knowing that our deaths have assured their daily bread to the honest workmen of Saint-Ugel. Because, aside from the dividends, there are the salaries and wages to be considered. But let me tell you something of importance. I was informed by telephone an hour ago that the consuls have had an interview with the Chinese mayor of Shanghai. Monsieur T. T. Kiang has acquainted them with the anxiety in Nankin. Before Chang Kai Tchek will have been able to reorganise his forces which were defeated by the Reds at the frontier of the Ngan-Hoei, the

Reds will have had plenty of time to swarm into Shanghai like an army of ants. Before the end of the week, Hangchow will be in their hands."

"In that case, shouldn't the defence of the city be organised at once?" asked the director of the bank of the Extreme-Orient, who could already picture his safes being pillaged by the enemy.

"The question is being seriously considered. To-morrow, the consuls are going to meet at the British Consulate, and it is highly probable that they will call out all the volunteers of the Concessions. You may as well shine up your belt and boots!"

"The guard of the French Concession is on the alert. Commandant Fabre is already manning his armoured cars. The White Russians of the shock troops are already smacking their lips in anticipation of what they're going to do to the Chinese Bolsheviks!"

"Well, well! At last we're going to have a bit of amusement in Shanghai!" rejoiced young Bertrand of the Asiatic Petroleum. "Frankly, I was beginning to get bored with cross country walks on Saturday afternoons."

Old Clapellier, the most ancient inhabitant of the Concession, who remembered the debuts of Clara Naddar, the Egeria of bachelors in want for soul mates, shook his head and said gravely:

"There's just one thing to be feared and that is that our nights on guard duty may get a bit too hot when 50,000 Reds surround the Concessions. Because the Chinese Bolsheviks have steadily gained ground ever since Chen Tou Siou founded the party in May of 1921. They have sworn to avenge

Chang Tai Lai, the president of the revolutionary committee of Canton, who was beaten in 1927 by Li Chi Chen. They objected strenuously to those wagonloads of severed heads and to their women violated or tortured. And so, without wishing to spread any gloom over this merry throng, I would prefer to see the gentlemen of Nankin and Hankow wash their scarlet linen in private and thus distract the attention of those hungry comrades from these Concessions."

The director of the bank of the Extreme-Orient, who was in no joking mood, added :

"Can you see us being taxed in advance, until 1987, as in the Sé-Tchouen? God help us if that happens! I've half a mind to send my precious metal to Saigon for safe-keeping."

The Commandant Harbellot was called to the telephone. He soon reappeared with a sardonic smile, and, lowering his voice, he confided to his friends :

"Gentlemen, a friend on the inside has just given me the news. Martial law will be proclaimed to-morrow at four o'clock and all the volunteers will be convoked by their respective consuls."

* * *

The following day, which was the 7th of July, the heat in Shanghai was sweltering. A burning breeze stirred up waves of dust in the avenues of the Concession.

The skyscrapers of the Bund thrust up into the too-blue heavens their shafts sweating in the sun. The waters of the Whangpoo, yellow as molten clay, flopped lazily against the white hulls of the

dispatch boats and the grey sides of the cruisers, monsters ready to strike. The prostrated coolies dozed in the shade of their rickshas.

A Chinese in tattered clothing, who looked far more like a beggar than a messenger, stopped before the lodgings at number 144 rue Stanislas Chevalier, about five hundred yards from police headquarters. He asked a question, crossed the courtyard and, conducted by a little girl, finally confronted a young *amah* who was busy washing. It was Perforated-Lotus. The man gave her a letter addressed to Madame Paulette Ho Chung and sat down on the wall to wait for an answer.

Perforated-Lotus hurried into the little room where Paulette, in a kimono, was sleeping, exhausted by the heat.

"Madame! Madame!" she cried, brandishing the envelope which was covered with seals and characters as incomprehensible for her as for her mistress. "Old Chinese man—no good looky—he bling letter—Master he sure like Madame!"

Paulette sat up on the bed. She seized the envelope and saw her name, written in French, in the corner. Her heart beat madly as she read these words written on a piece of Chinese letter paper with red vertical lines:

"My dear little wife,

"I am writing to you from near Hangchow, from the Monastery of the Silent Cult, which is my headquarters. Perhaps you have not heard the news but we will soon be in possession of the city where we will organise our troops to march on the Concessions. I

am confiding this letter to a messenger I can trust. If you see him, don't be afraid of him. He is disguised as a beggar to avoid all suspicion in case the nationalists are already occupying the territory around Shanghai.

"My little sweetheart of the springtime, I would be very miserable to be away from you, and I would not tolerate even this temporary separation were I not overwhelmed with pride and joy by the importance of the post that has recently been given me. They have confidence in me. Teng Fah, who has been called to the Kiangsi front, has placed me in charge of the Intelligence Service of the Third Red Army. I have become General Tsang's right arm. I am working for our Cause with all my heart. I scarcely sleep four hours in twenty-four. It is hard. But I am happy. Very happy. I am also very sad to think of you alone so far from me. I am enclosing ten ten-dollar bills because I am afraid you may be short of money. I do not want you to suffer, my beloved, my only little woman. Yes, believe me when I say 'only' because although I haven't seen you for five and a half months I have not so much as looked at another woman. And don't think it's because there aren't any to be had. When my men took the villages of the Chékiang, they were embarrassed only by the choice. General Tsang himself offered me the daughter of a rich merchant of Chao Hing who was killed because he refused to make his 'spontaneous donation.' He only had one daughter, a pretty little thing of fifteen. But I refused her because of my love for you, Paulette, and I gave her to Tchao, a Cantonese comrade, who is one of my best agents. He is devoted to me. He has only one eye and a harelip. The girl screamed in

fright when she saw him. But war is war, Paulette !
*And you can't imagine how delighted comrade Tchao
was with such a prize !*

" Stay where you are, dear, until you hear from me again and, if ever the police should ask about me, say that your husband disappeared six months ago and that you don't know whether he's dead or alive. I have high hopes that, when we attack the Concessions, we'll have the support of the comrades of the city itself. I'll warn you in time and let you know whether it's wise for you to come to me or to remain where you are. If you are to join me, you will receive a safe-conduct and one of our surest men will bring you into our lines.

" I think of you every day, my little golden spring-time. The other night I found time to compose a poem in five syllables after the style of the Emperor Wou. Destiny will reunite us soon so that I can translate these pretty verses for you. They are all about you.

" You are and you will remain my dear little wife, and I kiss you ten thousand times.

“ Ho Chung.

" P.S.—My agent has orders to swallow this letter if he is stopped on the way. If you receive it, please burn it as soon as you've read it for your own sake as well as mine."

Paulette was so delighted to have news from her husband that she lay down on the bed to read the message a second time.

How affectionate and kind he was ! How he must love her to sit down and write such sweet

things to her when he was overworked and burdened with the responsibility of handling the Intelligence Service of a whole army! She, too, would have liked to kiss him ten thousand times, to feel on her bare shoulders the light, gentle touch of his fine fingers; she would have loved to listen while he read that poem which she had inspired.

Paulette's was a strange destiny. She, a little Parisienne of the Left Bank, was abandoned now in Shanghai, the wife of a Chinese who was rapidly becoming one of the foremost leaders of the legions enrolled under the sign of Moscow. She recalled now everything she had been through since that tragic night when, after being insulted by her brother-in-law's second Madame, she had come to live in this empty little place. Their uncertain existence had recommenced. Ho Chung had finally told her all the truth. She had admired the stoicism with which he had allowed himself to be accused and humiliated to protect his chief and to further the cause to which he was devoted. Months had passed. Months of anxiety, months of sudden separations when her husband, under the orders of Teng Fah, had disappeared to return exhausted but proud of his achievements. Then the news of the defeat of the nationalists had surprised everybody in Shanghai. Teng Fah, sure of the sound judgment and the sincerity of his young assistant, had recommended him to the chief of the Third Red Army, the victorious army, the army which knew no fear and in which the soldiers were trained by Russian and German officers.

And now her husband was far from her, with the

enemy, hidden amongst the Red troops in that monastery of the Silent Cult of which the name alone was as terrifying to her as a Tibetan mask in the shadow of a pagoda.

Yes, Paulette's was a strange destiny ! She was waiting patiently for her husband on the other side of the barricade and she was accompanied by that brave Perforated-Lotus whose fidelity and gaiety rendered her existence endurable. Because the servant girl had refused to be separated from her mistress. Forty-eight hours after the tragic scene, she had fled from the family house and, all red with emotion, had knocked timidly on the door of the lodgings. Still gasping for breath, she had said :

"Me no can leave Madame. Big Master he tly catchy-catchy Pelfolated-Lotus. No can do—Second Madame she too no can do. Me no likee big slap she give me. Me no wanchee big slap, hittle slap—lookkee ! Face all led—no good ! Me say you plomenade avec moa ! Now me washee-washee and make chowchow for Madame——"

Paulette would have liked to kiss her. That dear Perforated-Lotus who had come running to her with her cheek still smarting from the stinging slap Madame Lovely-Torture had given her ! And, since that evening, she had felt less abandoned in this feverish and indifferent Shanghai where she knew no white people except an employee of the French Consulate and the two police inspectors she had met on the *Aramis*. But they were not disposed to waste their leisure hours with a Frenchwoman who was faithful to a Chinese husband, with a serious young wife who had no desire to spend

her nights in dance halls with two bold and rather vulgar escorts.

And so for months she had been living in expectation of rare messages from her husband, reading every day, in the *Journal de Shanghai*, the latest news from the Chinese fighting fronts, not knowing whether it was her duty to hope for the defeat of the Reds or for the invasion of the Concessions.

She sat down at the table to reply. When her letter was finished she called Perforated-Lotus and asked :

"Is the messenger still there? Monsieur has told me to give him my letter."

"Yes, Madame. Boy he wait. You, Madame, no look see boy—ugly Chinoise—make afraid. Give me letter——"

Perforated-Lotus beckoned to Ho Chung's agent. They exchanged a few words on the threshold. The man in rags slipped the envelope between his filthy shirt and his filthier skin, saluted and disappeared. Paulette struck a match and, with a sigh, burned the ten thousand kisses which had been sent to her from the Monastery of the Silent Cult.

CHAPTER II

KIDNAPPING

GENERAL TSANG, commanding the Third Red Army, belched. Then he belched a second time, but not quite so vigorously. The meeting of the war council was now ready to consult. In the middle of the table there were bowls of sesame seeds, "dragons' eyes," some mandarines and some cigarettes.

The General was presiding. He wore a khaki uniform with a red insignia. On his right, there sat Colonel Fu Tso, who was acting Chief of Staff; on his left, was Major Mikouline, of the Russian Bolshevik Army, his military adviser. There were two brigade commanders detached from the Fourth Red Army at Houpei and there was Ho Chung, chief of the Intelligence Service. On the threshold of this little hall in the Monastery of the Silent Cult a Chinese in a black tunic, white collar, sandals and a red brassard was standing guard. The Monastery was situated about seven miles from Hangchow, in the bottom of a narrow valley, in a forest of pines, cedars, bamboos and magnolias. The General had decided to establish his headquarters here. With blows of clubs the soldiers had driven out the bonzes, those saintly men who silently honoured the Cult of the Enlightened Sage, the eternal son of the Queen Maya Devi. This lonely retreat, perfumed

with incense, this refuge of meditation where the gongs scarcely disturbed the mute adoration of the priests, had become a buzzing hive of ferocious warriors, impatient to conquer new lands, to pillage and to kill.

"Comrades," said General Tsang, whose long, flat visage might have been carved with a hatchet from the trunk of a poplar, "we are united here to discuss the situation. It is only favourable in appearance. We have, it is true, invaded the Chekiang without meeting with serious resistance. Our men have been able to nourish themselves at the expense of the inhabitants, ransom the farmers and look upon their advance as a military manoeuvre. Our comrades of the Fourth and Fifth Armies have suffered far more than we have. It cost them something to defeat the Nationalists. But now it's going to be our turn to fight. We are going to invade the Kiangsu. Before my 7,000 rifles can reap their just reward in the rich region of Shanghai, considerable time may pass and, until then, I cannot pay my men. The treasury is empty and we are short of munitions. I have notified our chief, who has telegraphed me to find the necessary money, because it is impossible for him to take 1,000 pieces of silver from his own funds which are barely sufficient to meet expenses. I am going to read you his message."

The General unfolded several sheets of paper and, in his guttural voice, strangely like the barking of a dog, read the passage of prime interest to his subordinates :

"The successive campaigns in which we have

engaged against Chang Kai Tchek have drained our resources. Our war budget which is dependent on the taxes levied in Sovietised districts and on the subsidies from Moscow shows a deficit at the very hour when victory is smiling at us, and we are approaching Shanghai.

" ' It is extremely doubtful if we can obtain any loans from the foreign banks, although we have numerous sympathisers in France and England. The old tricks of Yuan Che Kai who borrowed supposedly to maintain order and to safeguard the property and the lives of the foreigners will not work for us.

" ' Therefore, it devolves upon you to use every conceivable method, even the most severe, to obtain the funds essential for the maintenance of your army.' "

The General rested his fat pig-sticker's hands on the table, because, before acquiring command of a Red army, he had stuck pigs on the high Yung Tse at Lou Tchow, and concluded :

" We must get money ! But how ? "

" By pillage, General. Isn't the region of Hangchow very prosperous ? " This was the Colonel's suggestion.

" It is prosperous beyond a doubt, but ask the chief of the Intelligence Service to enlighten us on the subject."

Ho Chung leaned forward, his hands clasped on the table, and spoke in his turn :

" General, I have terminated my investigation according to your instructions. The rich merchants of the region have recently been taxed to

the limit by the nationalist authorities who anticipated our advance. They have clipped all the wool from the sheep. Another thing, the receipts of the city of Hangchow have been taken to Nankin. I can guarantee the subsistence of the army, but I greatly fear that we shall have great difficulty laying our hands on enough cash to pay the men regularly during the months to come, not to mention the purchase of material and munitions."

"Precisely. And I cannot be content with bare food and lodging for my men. I must have funds."

The General went through the motions of strangling a fat bag of dollars and bellowed :

"Funds ! I want funds !"

"Exactly how much ?" asked the Major.

"I must have at least four million dollars before the eighth moon. And we can't count on more than a million of 'spontaneous donations'—if we can get that !"

"But if we employ violence ?" questioned the chief of the seventh Brigade.

"A hundred heads cut off are not worth a good cheque on a prosperous Shanghai bank."

"But surely the threat would suffice to obtain the amount in Hangchow."

"Presuming you're right. We'll take the city in a week. Between now and then what will happen ? All the rich people will have fled and found refuge in the foreign Concessions. Where am I going to get my four millions ?"

There was a heavy silence. The General's objections were sound. His soldiers had received no pay for five months. Authorised pillage had calmed

their impatience. But it was an unsatisfactory system. Women violated and abused, sacks of rice wasted, orgies in the farms, stolen clothes, opium smoking whenever off duty—all that was the small change of customary brigandage in China. It did not serve to replace the rifles broken or sold by the soldiers, the cartridges consumed, the lost material or the worn-out shoes.

The chief of the Seventh Brigade turned to spit. He barely missed the copper spittoon. Colonel Fu Tso bit into a "dragon's eye." The Russian officer lit a cigarette. They all reflected deeply. Suddenly, Ho Chung, who was the youngest member of the War Council, leaned toward General Tsang and said :

" I have a proposition to make, General."

The chief considered him ironically. His eyes disappeared beneath his lowered lids and he grunted :

" Have you found gold in this temple ? "

" No, General. But I think I know a way to get four million dollars for our army."

Everyone looked at Ho Chung. The General, brushing seeds away with the back of his hand, snorted :

" Four million sapeks ! "

" No, General. Four million silver dollars in good Shanghai money."

" How ? "

" By kidnapping a certain rich man I know. He'd pay fast enough to save his hide."

" Where does he live ? "

" In Shanghai."

" What's his name ? "

"General, with all respect, I am going to ask you to permit me not to reveal his name. All that I can tell you is that, six months ago, my chief, Teng Fah, sent an agent to see this rich man and to ask him for a 'spontaneous donation' of two millions for the Cause. The person in question was furious. Teng Fah's messenger was beaten by the guards and thrown senseless on to the sidewalk outside the park. Teng Fah swore to get vengeance. I also have a little bone to pick with the gentleman. We will kidnap him and this time we will make him give us four millions instead of two."

"How much is he worth?" asked the Major.

"At least fifteen millions."

"If that's true," said the General, showing his long yellow teeth, "he should be taxed at least ten!"

"If you exact too much, he'll probably prefer to die, and then we'll have been to all the trouble for nothing," the Colonel reasoned wisely.

Ho Chung shook his head.

"No. He's a coward. He's afraid to die. I ask you, General, to let me handle him and I'll get every penny I can."

"All right! But squeeze your lemon dry! What did you say about a guard?"

"General, he employs eight White Russians to watch over him night and day. The kidnapping will not be easy. And for that reason I would like to be allowed to pick ten men who haven't got fox livers. I would put Tchao, the Cantonese, at their head."

"Tchao, the harelip?"

"One-eyed Tchao?"

" Yes, comrades. He's a brave fellow, devoted to the Cause, and he'll do anything if he's promised the prize he likes."

" Does he drink ? "

" No, General—he is fond of the ladies."

The members of the War Council guffawed. The Russian officer cried :

" I know your Tchao ! He has a face that would scare a lion and he thinks he's a devil with the women ! "

" Yes, Major, that's the one. And he gets pretty women too. He initiated a lovely little thing from Chao Hing into the arts of love. I gave her to him in compensation for his services. He was wild with joy. If he succeeds in kidnapping the rich man I have in mind, I'll find him another beauty. Because he's already tired of the one he has ! "

" If you keep on," joked Colonel Fu Tso, " the Third Army will have to have a special wagon for your harelip's harem ! "

" If that son of a tortoise gets us the four millions, I'll pay him a night with the prettiest girls in Shanghai—and out of my own pocket ! Ha ! Haa ! Haaa ! " roared the General.

Then, suddenly, he struck the table a blow with his fist that scattered the seeds in all directions. And he ordered :

" Enough joking ! Ho Chung, you take charge of this kidnapping and keep me advised."

He emptied his cup of almost cold tea and belched mightily. The War Council was dismissed.

* * *

Ho Chung and his agents occupied one of the

dormitories of the Monastery of the Silent Cult. It had previously been reserved for uninitiated bonzes whose shaven heads had not yet been marked with the ritual burns.

The meeting of the War Council had broken up at six in the evening. At seven, Tchao, the Cantonese, ordered on the run, appeared before Ho Chung, who communicated to him General Tsang's decision.

"The kidnapping of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, has been ordered by the commander-in-chief, and I have selected you to head the expedition. It is not an easy job. Because, if you risk nothing from the police of the Concessions, since Ho Ta Wen lives just outside the zone, you risk being mowed down by the guns of the Russian guard. And they are determined devils who won't give him up without resistance. You'll have to resort to a ruse of some sort."

"All right, chief."

"If you succeed, the General will give you a handsome prize and I'll get you an even prettier girl than the one I gave you last month. Understand?"

At these words, Tchao's right eye, his good one, gleamed with pleasure. The other, the one he had lost in a fight in a floating dive in Canton, on the river of Pearls, remained half closed, so that Tchao, even in the evening, always gave the appearance of squinting in the sun. He repeated, running his tongue across his harelip:

"An even prettier girl, chief?"

"Yes. A girl worthy of an Emperor! You'll see."

" All right, chief. And when do I start off with my men ? "

" Wait a moment. I've told you that you'd have to trick them if you don't want those Russians to shoot you full of holes."

" Got to get him by surprise ? "

" That's it. And you can only do that with the help of someone who lives in his house."

" Who's that ? "

" Hsu, his secretary."

" But isn't he liable to betray me ? "

" No, because your first move will be to get an interview with Hsu on one pretext or another. You will give him this letter which I'm addressing to him and which bears Teng Fah's seal. The secretary has met our chief before and he knows that if he refuses to help us in secret he'll be a dead man within twenty-four hours. If he shows any signs of hesitation, you can remind him."

" How many men can I take with me ? "

" Ten. I'll choose them myself. For arms, a revolver and a package of red pepper for each of you. You will take the main Hangchow-Shanghai road in two Ford trucks loaded with cabbages. Whatever you do, don't have any arguments with Du She Wei's gang. The opium ring must not get wind of what you're up to. You can sell your cabbages at the Zikawei market, but nothing else ! "

" I understand, chief."

" The General is in a great hurry for this ransom. And I can't wait to get my hands on this ' spontaneous donor.' And you, you're anxious to have a

look at the precious jade I've promised you. Is that clear, Tchao?"

A new light of concupiscence illumined the valid eye of the Cantonese while his dead eye closed convulsively. There were little bubbles on his harelip. He replied:

"Yes, chief."

"Then get along with you, old bandit!"

Tchao saluted and disappeared. Ho Chung called Fong, his private secretary, and whispered:

"Listen, Fong, you take a horse a ride over to Kong Chen Tchiao—you know, on the banks of the river——"

"I know."

"Cross the big bridge and, leaving the little Japanese Concession on your right, go straight ahead. To the west of the main street, you will find, in the fifth or sixth little street, the house of *Ten Thousand Delights*. You tell the lady there that, by order of the General, she is to reserve her prettiest girl for the end of the week."

"For whom, chief?"

"Don't you tell the mistress, but its for Tchao."

"The poor girl!"

"She'll be his reward if he succeeds in his mission. And I have an idea it won't take him long. You'd best say this to the lady: 'I want a very beautiful girl, good enough for the General himself. If you don't keep your word, I'll come here with fifty comrades and we'll pluck the feathers off your chickens, set fire to your *Ten Thousand Delights*, and violate you in the ashes of your ancestral planks——'"

CHAPTER III

TCHAO CARRIES OUT HIS MISSION

THE truck had stopped on the edge of the road. The soldiers of the Third Army, who were loitering around, approached it. They were curious to have a look at the fat man who was swearing and pleading and who had trouble getting out because his ankles were fettered.

Tchao had taken this precaution to avoid all possibility of his prey escaping. He pointed to a path through the valley which led to the Monastery of the Silent Cult. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was still loud in his protestations. He refused to walk. Tchao nodded to a soldier who promptly prodded the prisoner's round backside with his bayonet.

Surrounded by his kidnappers, stumbling, cursing, puffing, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, finally advanced. After half an hour's walk, they reached the wall of the Monastery. Tchao left his sweating prize under heavy guard and entered the room where Ho Chung and his secretary, Fong, were hard at work.

When Ho Chung saw the glimmer in the good eye, between the oblique lids, he knew that the Cantonese had succeeded. He said:

"Well, Tchao. So you caught the fat rat in his hole?"

" Yes, chief. But I had my troubles because that man Hsu eats mutton in the East and dog in the West."

Ho Chung knew this proverb. He exclaimed :

" What ! Hsu dared to try to double-cross us after what Teng Fah told him he'd get if he did ? "

" I don't say that, but I saw quick enough that he wasn't keeping his word with me when he failed to come to a meeting with me where he was supposed to bring the person in question. So I gave him a warning. I had Li follow him and when Li saw him about to open a door, Li, who's as quick as a flash, threw his knife so that it stuck in the wall just over Hsu's hand. It just took a bit of skin off the end of his thumb. Hsu was afraid and came back to Li, who politely gave him a little note calling him to order. Hsu understood that I was serious and asked Li to bring him to me. I explained to him that he risked more by protecting Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, than by collaborating with us. He objected that if he watched for the tiger at the front door the wolf might get in by the back door. I let him examine Li's knife and he saw that the tiger was worse than the wolf. He said to me :

" " Well, then, I prefer to have you kidnap us both, the Master and me, at five o'clock to-morrow. That will save appearances. We are going by automobile to the temple of the Perfumed Hill. The guards will stay outside with the car. I will lead the Master behind the Court of the Two Dragons where the guards won't be able to see him. Then it's up to you to act. But will you promise to let me go ? "

"I said to him: 'I'll let you go. I'm willing to give you a chance if you play square with me. All you have to do is to take advantage of our lack of attention the very same night.'

"The next afternoon at three o'clock the guardians of the Temple of the Perfumed Hill, threatened by my men, wandered off in one direction or another. At five-thirty, we had done our work, noiselessly, rapidly and without bloodshed. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, and Hsu, gagged and bound, were lying in the bottom of the truck which was cutting across country as fast as it could go. I suppose the guards and the chauffeur were still waiting patiently outside the temple."

"And you didn't meet a soul on the Hangchow road?"

"No. And Hsu escaped, according to the agreement, during the night."

"Are you sure he'll keep quiet?"

"He's no good! When he eats, he's afraid he'll swallow a bone. When he spits, he's afraid he'll lose some good meat!"

"Tchao, I congratulate you. You will have your prize this evening."

The good eye burned again. And the harelip uncovered the sharp yellow teeth as the Cantonese asked:

"Is she pretty?"

"She's the prettiest girl of Kong Chen. She was offered to the General by the mistress of the *Ten Thousand Delights*. She's going to be yours instead. Is that good enough?"

Tchao bowed respectfully as he said:

"The crystal of the Lord is the diamond of his slave."

"In the meantime, and before you begin to admire the brilliance of the jewel, wait outside and when I strike the gong bring in the prisoner."

* * *

General Tsang entered the small hall. He was in fine spirits. He had eaten well and he had drunk his fill. He cracked the chief of the Intelligence Service between the shoulders and bellowed:

"What's this I hear, Ho Chung? Have you really kidnapped the gentleman who doesn't know what to do with his millions? The one whose urine is golden when one exerts a little pressure on his belly? Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"I have him, General."

"Fine work, Ho Chung! You are a great help to the Cause and I appreciate you!"

"I am only a stupid subordinate, General, and my poor efforts are not worthy of your notice."

"Have you already negotiated with the prisoner?"

"Not yet, General. I preferred to reserve for you the pleasure of interviewing him first and of explaining to him the high estimate you have of the value of his liberty." Ho Chung bowed to his chief and concluded: "The hunting dog brings back the game, but he does not kill it."

"Well said, Ho Chung! I won't forget that!" And, lowering his voice, the General confided: "I'm going to ask him for ten millions."

"Ho!"

"In the hope of getting five. We've got a week

in which to bargain with him. If I get my money within ten days, everything will be all right. But you'll stay here while I talk with him."

"General, if you'll permit it, I would prefer not to be present. That is, for the time being."

"All right. Get behind that door and have the prisoner sent in. What's his name?"

"Ho Ta Wen."

"What? Of the Ho family like yourself?"

"There are several Ho families, General."

With an evasive gesture the young chief of the Intelligence Service dismissed the question, struck the gong and said to Tchao, who appeared at once:

"Bring in your man. The General wants to see him."

"Yes, chief."

The General straddled a chair. Ho Chung hid behind the door. They heard noises in the outer gallery of the temple. Gun stocks striking on the floors. Finally, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, arrived, encouraged by two soldiers who prodded him continually with their bayonets. He stumbled and almost fell on the uneven floor and looked at the officer in surprise. Tchao made the introductions:

"General, this is the man you asked to see. He lives in Chinese territory in Shanghai and his name is Ho Ta Wen. We captured him yesterday."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, saluted very respectfully the commander-in-chief of the Third Red Army who, gripping his chair like the back of a horse, pointed to a bench. When the General was not laughing, he had a wicked-looking face. It was long and rectangular, adorned with a suspicion of a

black moustache which drooped at the corners, with eyes which shone with cruelty. It was a hard, impassive face which inspired fear. He signed to two soldiers to stand on either side of the prisoner. Then he spoke :

" The visit which you have been good enough to make to my modest headquarters overwhelms me with joy."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was not ignorant of the classic rites of politeness on all occasions. He hastened to reply with equal courtesy :

" Your Excellency, it is unpardonable of me to have delayed until to-day to bring to you in person the expression of my homage and my admiration."

" Your good and noble sentiments render it easy for me to grant that pardon."

The General turned to Tchao and ordered :

" And the tea ? Since when have you neglected to serve the refreshments worthy of an honoured guest ? Be quick about it, imbecile !"

Tchao, stupefied, made as if to have suddenly learned a lesson in the laws of hospitality and replied :

" Excuse me, General !"

He disappeared to give the necessary orders. There was a long silence. The General contemplated Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, who, quavering under this withering regard, awaited impatiently the return of Tchao. They finally brought the tea. The two men sipped a little of the green beverage. Thus they made the fitting sacrifice to the rules of etiquette. Now the conversation could begin in

earnest. The chair squeaked under the General's weight as he demanded without transition:

"At what figure do you estimate the price of your liberty?"

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, pretended to be surprised.

"My liberty? Am I a prisoner here?"

"Certainly not. But the hospitality of headquarters of the Third Red Army is not free. Kindly be good enough to estimate it at its worth."

"Your Excellency, I feel sure that you would be the last to tickle my lips with my own bread!"

The General's chair squeaked again. Ho Ta Wen's attitude was beginning to annoy him. He grew brutal.

"Enough of this! How much will you pay to go back to your home to-morrow?"

"But, your Excellency, I am so charmed to be your guest that I have no thought of leaving."

The General snapped to his feet. He picked up his chair in his right hand and hurled it at the wall. His eyes were almost invisible as he roared:

"No one in the world has ever dared laugh in the face of the commander-in-chief of the Third Red Army—man! Do you hear?"

"Laugh in the face of Your Excellency! I would never dream of such a thing. But Your Excellency proposes that I should give him money for the right to leave him. As I am enjoying my sojourn in these headquarters, it would be an insult were I to offer dollars to depart."

The irony of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, exasperated the General, who advanced toward his guest and,

with a coolness which was far more impressive than a burst of temper, replied :

"The wind of the executioner's axe is not far from your neck."

"If it were to come any nearer, Your Excellency, my head would fall and I would be unable to pay even a sapek for your hospitality which is of such short duration. A dead man cannot sign—not even if he is offered ten millions."

The General instinctively grabbed for his revolver in its holster. Ho Chung, who was a spectator from his position behind the door, feared that the rage of his chief was going to cost the life of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, and he knew that such a solution to the problem would be worse than useless. Happily, the hand rested on the gun and the gun rested in its holster and the prisoner was no worse off unless for a cold sweat.

The General turned to the Cantonese :

"Tchao, take that man out of my sight and keep your eye on him. If he escapes, you'll be shot !"

"Yes, General."

The soldiers dragged Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, away. The General called Ho Chung from his hiding-place and said :

"Did you hear everything ?"

"Yes, General."

"And you still claim that's the man who will offer 'spontaneously' four million dollars for his liberty ?"

"General, permit me——"

"Either you're a stupid fool or you're trying to have a laugh at my expense. You're responsible

for this. It's up to you to make that fat frog spit up the money you promised us. If he doesn't do it, I'll take care of you so you won't forget it, and I'll tell Teng Fah that I don't want any practical jokers in my Intelligence Service. He'll know what I mean——"

The General drew close to Ho Chung and, eye to eye, his fists clenched, he repeated:

"You hear? I don't like practical jokers, Ho Chung. At the War Council, you showed us a diamond made of paste! You boasted of the great trick you were going to pull off and all you've done is to expose me to the sarcastic answers of a man I'd have shot if I didn't have a head on my shoulders. Now, Ho Chung, you listen to me. To-morrow, we're going to attack Hangchow. I'll be busy for a week and I won't have any time for this business. But if, by the end of next week, you haven't got the money from that man by one means or another, I'll call a meeting of the War Council and you'll be there; but—you'll be there to be judged!"

CHAPTER IV

MADAME LOVELY-TORTURE RETORTS

APPLE-BLOSSOM was talking in a low voice with Perforated-Lotus. They were standing outside Paulette's door. The conversation lasted five minutes. Finally, Perforated-Lotus knocked, entered and said with a mysterious air :

"Madame, she have visit——"

"A visit? Who is it?"

"The selvante of Madame Noumelo Two of Master-Big Master. She come walky-walky and she tell me her Madame have news about Monsieur——"

Paulette started. Since the letter brought by the man in beggar's clothes, she had not heard a word from her husband, and the long silence was beginning to worry her. She asked :

"What news? Tell me quickly!"

"Vely bad—mauvais nouvelle—no good!"

"But what! Can't you explain? Hurry!"

"Madame Noumelo Two no talky-talky. Only say no good!"

"But I must know. This is worse than nothing. You don't expect me to be contented with that!"

"Yes—no—yes—— Selvante she say also you go talky-talky Second Madame——"

"Where?"

"Big house—house big Master——"

"Give me my hat—I'm going at once!"

Perforated-Lotus hesitated. She seemed perplexed. Paulette ordered:

"Hurry! Give me my hat, I tell you!"

"Me no like you go visit Madame Nourmelo Two. Pas con fiance. No good—savez?"

"You're crazy! What do you imagine is going to happen to me? And I must hear what she knows about my husband. He may be wounded—or desperately ill!"

"Yes. Maybe. But why Second Madame she know? No good!"

"Oh, how stupid you can be! Don't you see that the greatest pleasure she could have would be to tell me something awful. She'd rather make me miserable than anything on earth! Oh, God! If I only knew already——"

By this time Paulette was ready. Despite all the arguments Perforated-Lotus could think of, she insisted on going with Apple-Blossom. As she got into a ricksha, Paulette ordered her maid:

"You stay here—I'll be back in an hour."

And off she went, followed by Apple-Blossom, who said nothing. But the two rickshas had no more than disappeared around the corner than Perforated-Lotus locked the door and, disregarding her mistress' orders, she set out on foot for the house of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder.

* * *

Madame Lovely-Torture was roving round and round in her room like a panther in its cage. This afternoon, she was dressed in a long black robe

and she wore no ornament except a coral pin which caught her hair behind the neck. She was circling around the armchair in which the secretary of her Master, the young Hsu, was sitting, doing his best to tell her everything he could without risking the vengeance of the Reds.

Madame Lovely-Torture consulted the last clock which Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had given her. There were seven in her room, all of different sizes and shapes and they all indicated different hours.

"Do you think she'll come, Hsu?"

"I think so, Madame. Your intelligence has dictated to you the surest way of enticing her here. What woman who loves her husband does not forget everything else when she learns that he has met with an accident?"

"Well, I won't be contented until I get her in my power. My prey! Do you hear me, Hsu? My prey!"

As she pronounced these words, she opened and closed her pretty white hands like claws which were tearing an imaginary victim into bits.

"I well understand your sentiments, Madame. After everything that's happened!"

"Ah! If only the Master had managed to escape as you did, Hsu?"

"Alas! He had no opportunity. I took advantage of a moment when the bandits took their eyes off me. Something on the Hangchow road probably startled them. But I risked my life, Madame."

"Are you sure they were Communists?"

"Not absolutely sure, Madame, but it's more than likely."

"Then you suppose they have taken my poor well-beloved into the lines of the Red Armies?"

"It's very probable. That's what the police was inclined to believe when I made my report this morning. There will be something about it in the *Shen Pao* this evening, Madame."

"And you think they've kidnapped him to demand a ransom?"

"Beyond a doubt. Money for the Red Cause, Madame."

"And do you agree with me that my brother-in-law is responsible for this crime?"

Hsu, who knew the exact answer to this question, deemed it prudent to make no affirmations. Hsu, since the warning he had received from Teng Fah and since the knife had skinned his thumb, was most desirous to say nothing which could be used against him. His was an agreeable existence and he did not seek to cut it short.

"I have no way of knowing but, since you are certain, Madame, that Brother Two holds a position of importance in the Red Armies, your deduction seems very reasonable to me."

"Well, Hsu, whether my deduction is reasonable or not, I'm going to risk everything on it."

The secretary hid his long hands in the wide flowing sleeves of his black tunic. He did not want to give an opinion, even by a gesture. Madame Lovely-Torture went on:

"Are you capable of translating into French what I am going to say to that woman when she comes?"

"Yes, Madame. I speak the language well enough for that."

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Apple-Blossom, who announced that Paulette was outside in the Court of the Sycamores. Madame Lovely-Torture's eyes were alight with triumph as she cried:

"I knew she'd come! Bring her in here!"

* * *

Paulette appeared. At first she was astonished to see Hsu. Then she realised that his presence was essential, for he was the only person in the house who spoke any French. Her heart beating fast with anxiety, she bowed to Madame Lovely-Torture and exclaimed without preamble:

"Here I am, Madame! I've come to find out what you know about my husband because you've heard something, haven't you?"

Hsu translated. The same words in the mandarin language sounded too direct and too brutal. If Paulette had understood the Chinese psychology a little better, she would have known that it was extremely rude to speak this way without having first indulged in the traditional exchange of compliments. Madame Lovely-Torture was shocked by such vulgarity even from the lips of a barbarian. She would have vented her wrath on the spot had she not judged it advisable to get the woman's confidence by the semblance of a cordial reception.

"Madame," said Hsu, motioning in the concubine's direction, "is charmed to receive you in her very modest home. She invites you to take tea with her."

"Thank her for me, Monsieur Hsu, and tell her that I can't wait to know what's happened to my husband."

Hsu bowed politely and translated:

"The female savage wants the news of Brother Two immediately."

"Tell that monkey that first I want to know when and from where she received the last message from her husband."

Tea was served at this moment. For the sake of form, Paulette touched the cup to her lips. Then only did Hsu ask her:

"Madame will be only too glad to tell you all she knows. But will you tell her when last your husband wrote to you?"

"Two weeks ago."

"And from where?"

"From somewhere near Hangchow."

Hsu relayed this information to Madame Lovely-Torture who exclaimed:

"What did I tell you? She admits it herself! That confirms all my suspicions. There isn't the slightest doubt but what her husband is implicated in this crime."

"I must say that everything points to it——"

"Naturally he didn't do the dirty work himself, but he was the instigator. That gives me a perfect right to keep this woman here. She's in my power and she won't get out of it!"

Up to now Madame Lovely-Torture had not definitely announced her intention of making Paulette her prisoner. Hsu, who did not believe the concubine capable of such audacity, foresaw the

probable consequences with horror. When the kidnappers of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, learned of the reprisals exercised on Paulette by the Second Madame, they would immediately suspect him of having given them away. And the young secretary, with the soft hands of culture, the young secretary who abhorred danger and discomfort, was panic-stricken lest he be exposed to the vengeance of Tchao and his ruffians. He therefore objected :

“ If you make this woman your prisoner, Madame, you will enrage those bandits. Your customary wisdom is, for once, causing you to follow a perilous road——”

Madame Lovely-Torture, drawing herself up imperiously, interrupted :

“ Do you insinuate that you think I’m a woman who is going to let those brigands walk over me roughshod ? ”

“ Certainly not, Madame—I was only thinking that you would endanger the life of the Master.”

“ Think again and you’ll realise that I’ll completely paralyse Brother Two when I inform him that the life and the liberty of his wife are worth exactly as much to me as the life and the liberty of my husband are to him.”

This long discussion served to increase Paulette’s anguish and, losing all patience, she cried :

“ But, Monsieur Hsu, what are you two talking about ? Has something so terrible happened to my poor husband that you can’t tell me about it ? ”

The secretary translated :

“ The ridiculous monkey is getting nervous—she wants to know everything.”

When she heard that, Madame Lovely-Torture advanced threateningly toward Paulette and, as if the Frenchwoman could be expected to understand, she screamed in Chinese :

" You want to know everything, you filthy she-devil ! All right then—learn that you won't get out of my clutches until your rotten husband has released my Master safe and sound. What's more, if anything happens to my husband, if the Reds dare to hurt a hair of his head, this house will be your tomb ! "

Turning to Hsu, Madame Lovely-Torture ordered :

" Explain that to the stupid devil ! "

Hsu obeyed. Paulette had turned white as chalk. She understood too late how right Perforated-Lotus had been in trying to dissuade her from coming to this place. She had deliberately walked into the trap. Stammering with fear, she asked :

" But, Monsieur Hsu—I—I don't know what this—means—— Then—then, nothing has happened to my husband ? "

" The Second Madame has told you the truth. The day before yesterday your husband caused Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, to be kidnapped—I managed to escape. *But* he is still a prisoner of the Reds. Therefore, you'll be kept here as a hostage until the Master returns."

" But I won't be imprisoned here ! If you dare to touch me, I'll go straight to the French Consulate ! "

" That will be impossible for the present. But don't be unduly alarmed because this is merely a simple measure of precaution. They will soon

release your brother-in-law and you, in turn, will be at liberty."

Hsu spoke slowly and softly in the most reassuring tone. He was playing on all the tables at once and he wanted to be able to count on the white woman who, in the case of emergency, could testify that he had treated her with great respect and consideration.

Paulette turned about quickly. It was her idea to escape any way she could. If she could reach the outer courtyard perhaps Leonidoff would help her. But Madame Lovely-Torture had anticipated everything. At a sign from her, two servants rushed forward, overpowered Paulette and dragged her away as their mistress called after them :

"For the time being you can lock her up in the cellar under the pavilion of the Court of the Pines, and you can bring the key to me. To-night, I'll put her in safe keeping."

* * *

Perforated-Lotus lurked around the residence of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder. She knew all the inmates intimately. She had been waiting over two hours for Paulette to come out by the big gate. It was more than she could understand why it took such ages to communicate bad news.

About eight in the evening, when it was almost dark, she drew near the grill and spied Leonidoff outside the guardhouse. She beckoned to him. The tall Russian recognised the little servant at once. He addressed her in the Shanghai tongue :

"Hey there ! What are you doing here ? It's

at least a year since I've set eyes on you, little sister ! ”

Perforated-Lotus stuck her face between the bars and asked in a half-whisper :

“ Did you see my Madame go in ? ”

“ Yes—over two hours ago. She was with the Second Madame's servant—I almost dropped over in astonishment. She seemed in a great hurry. We no more than exchanged the time of day. But why this sudden visit just after the Master's disappearance ? ”

“ Because the second Madame sent Apple-Blossom to say that she had bad news to tell her.”

“ About her husband, of course. And—— ? ”

Perforated-Lotus pushed her head still farther between the bars and whispered :

“ I've been waiting ever since. I'm worried. Why doesn't she come out ? ”

“ Listen, little sister. I'll take a look around. If I discover anything, I'll let you know. Stay where you are.”

Perforated-Lotus sat down on the wall and waited. It was quite dark by this time. The avenue was deserted. She saw a police car go by on a tour of inspection of the approaches to the Concession. Half an hour passed. At last she heard the guard's heavy boots crunching on the gravel. She hastened to the gate and Leonidoff told her :

“ I've visited the gardens. I met Apple-Blossom in the Court of the Sycamores. She claims she doesn't know what's become of the French Madame. Ko, the cook, and Liang haven't seen any sign of

her. I took a look around the pavilion where she used to live in the West Court. Either nobody knows anything or they won't tell me."

"Just the same, I'm sure she hasn't left the premises. I've watched all the exits all the time."

"Then she's probably stayed for supper."

"Hum? The Second Madame hates her. You know that."

"Yes. It's very odd."

"And I'm worried—very worried!"

"Well, I tell you what you do. I'll keep my eyes open to-night. Come here to the gate early to-morrow morning and I'll tell you what's up."

Perforated-Lotus thanked him and disappeared into the night. It was pitch dark. She walked with little steps, shaking her head as she went. She knew she had been right when she had tried to prevent her mistress from talky-talky with the Madame Noumelo Two.

CHAPTER V

REPRISALS

HO CHUNG was sleeping badly in the corner of the dormitory where once had rested little bonzes. He was sleeping badly because he could hear the battalions of the Third Red Army filing by on the way to Hangchow which General Tsang had decided to invade. The city, poorly defended by a brigade of Nationalists, was certain to fall within a few days, and the prestige of the Red Army would be increased by the conquest of this important city.

But Ho Chung was principally preoccupied by the unpleasant interview he had had with his chief. He had not foreseen this resistance on the part of his brother. Now, it was clear that severe methods must be employed to force him to give in and pay a high price for his liberty and his life. Rolled in his blanket, Ho Chung considered these severe methods.

His reputation was at stake and, more than likely, his very existence. Because if he lost the confidence of his chief anything might happen. The General Tsang was known throughout the Red Armies for his ferocity and it was said of him, with reason, that he only had one way of dealing with those of his collaborators who proved themselves unworthy in his eyes. He promptly had them be-

headed. Consequently, Ho Chung had no time to lose.

He was up with the dawn and he sent for the faithful Tchao who was personally guarding the prisoner. The General's warning had made a deep impression on the Cantonese, and he had no intention of paying with his life for the escape of the "fat rat."

"Where is your man?" Ho Chung demanded.

"I've got him in the underground passage that runs beneath the chapel of Kwan-In. He's easy to watch there because there's only one way out. I've got two men at the exit all the time."

"I don't need to tell you that, in view of the chief's attitude, you won't get your prize until the 'fat rat' spits out his dollars."

Tchao scowled. The beauty promised him by the mistress of the *Ten Thousand Delights* was a dim dream now. But he had by no means lost hope of getting his precious jade, and he said with conviction:

"Chief, we'll have to force him to pay."

"That's precisely why I sent for you. Do you know the order of the questions as they were drawn up by Teng Fah?"

"Yes, chief. I know it by heart."

"Wait. Go and tell Fong to find the copy for me."

The Cantonese disappeared and returned a moment later with the secretary, who unrolled a long strip of paper for Ho Chung's attention. It was a strange piece of work, written in the artistic hand of a dilettante of torture. More exactly, it

was a most specific document outlining the horrors to be practised on hard-headed 'spontaneous donors' who persisted in refusing to pay the ransom exacted of them. On the left, was the list of the questions to be asked. On the right, was the list of the answers to make should the prisoner fail to comply. It read as follows :

The First Day

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Do you consent to buy your liberty ? | 1. Insert acacia thorns under the thumbnails. |
| 2. You still refuse the principle of purchase ? | 2. Hit the joints of the closed hands fifty time with a wooden mallet. |
| 3. You still refuse to pay a ransom ? | 3. Make incisions in the palms, sprinkle with ground glass, close and bind the hands. |

The Second Day

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4. You still object to producing a certain sum of money ? | 4. Cut off the fingers of the left hand, wrap them up and send to family. |
|---|---|

The Third Day

- | | |
|--|---|
| 5. You refuse to pay — dollars ? (State the amount.) | 5. Immobilise the head, turn back the eyelids and apply red pepper. |
|--|---|

The Fourth Day

- | | |
|---|--|
| 6. Your family offers — dollars. We want — dollars. (State the amount.) | 6. Cover the organs with honey and expose to insects in the sun or to ants as seems advisable. |
|---|--|

The Fifth Day

- | | |
|---|--|
| 7. Your family has had
our emissary, who
went to collect the
ransom, arrested. | 7. Apply red-hot irons
to the soles of the feet
and decapitate slowly
with a saw. |
|---|--|

"Fong," said Ho Chung, "make me a big copy of this disciplinary table. When you have finished it, give it to Tchao, who will hang it on the wall in the underground passage where the prisoner can study it to his heart's content."

"Yes, chief."

"And, Tchao, you can tell the 'fat rat' that the first day will commence at sunset this evening. If he answers no to the first question, have Li insert the thorns at once."

"Yes, chief."

"The three punishments for the first day are to be administered during the night."

"Yes, chief."

"We can't afford to waste time. For all our sakes, it is imperative that the man gives in and pay the price."

"Exactly how much is it?"

"Four million dollars. He has four times that amount in foreign money. And he'll pay. And sooner than the General imagines!"

"I hope so, chief."

"I'm certain of it."

Tchao and Fong saluted and left the room. Ho Chung crossed the central court of the Monastery and met Colonel Fu Tso, who took him to task:

"It appears, comrade Ho Chung, that you like to hang a sign far too big outside your shop."

This ironic allusion to his unfulfilled promises hurt Ho Chung's feelings. But he replied with dignity:

"Colonel, when the sign is big, the merchandise does not all arrive the same day. It is the General who——"

"Yes. The General has told us of his keen disappointment. The General is most annoyed."

"I regret with all my heart that I have failed to satisfy the General. But I am sure to succeed in the end."

The Colonel indulged in a little smile. It was an incredulous smile. He finally said very distinctly:

"Your assurance reassures me for your sake, comrade Ho Chung. Because, otherwise——"

The Chinese officer preferred to say no more, but there was something sinister about that smile which would have sent a shiver up and down the spine of a very brave man.

* * *

It was seven in the evening. Little by little, the shadows of the night were invading the pagodas and the courtyards of the Monastery of the Silent Cult. The immense yellow bronze statue of Buddha scarcely glistened in the half-light of the vast main hall. General Tsang had moved his headquarters a few miles further down the road. Two companies of young soldiers were camped about, guarding the stores and the last reserves of munitions.

Ho Chung consulted his wrist-watch. The first question was about to be put to his brother. The chief of the Intelligence Service was not particularly worried, for he had the firm conviction that the

prospect of real suffering would quickly decide the prisoner to pay the ransom. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was not enough of a stoic to submit to torture when he could avoid it by the sacrifice of a few dollars.

Ho Chung was seated at a little table and, to pass the time away, he was indulging in his favourite recreation. He was composing a poem on the clear shade of the magnolias when the full moon touches them with silver in the course of summer nights. He was so absorbed that he failed to remark the approach of one of his soldiers who scarcely dared to disturb his meditation.

"Pardon, chief," the man finally murmured.

"What is it?"

"There's a man outside with a message for you."

At these words, Ho Chung looked up quickly and forgot all about the full moon on the magnolias in the summer-time.

"Bring him to me!"

"Yes, chief."

The soldier returned with a dusty coolie, dripping with sweat and trembling with fear. It was plain that he was not a combatant.

"Where did you come from?" Ho Chung asked.

"From Shanghai. By train, by wagon and on foot."

"You're not a soldier in the Nationalist Army?"

"No—I am not a soldier at all."

"Then what are you doing around these headquarters?"

"I am looking for Master Ho Chung. I have a message for him."

"Very well. I'm Ho Chung. Give me the message."

The coolie produced an envelope addressed in a hand which Ho Chung failed to recognise. It said: *Master Ho Chung, Headquarters of the Third Red Army.* He had the impression that a woman had designed the characters.

"Who gave you this?"

"Liang, of the house of Master Ho Ta Wen, in Shanghai."

Ho Chung quickly broke the black seal. He read:

"My brother,

"No doubt this letter will reach you although I do not know your exact address. But it seems that the Reds, appreciative of your high capacities and your noble merits, have at last given you a post worthy of you. I offer you my congratulations. And I only regret that you have not informed me before this. I would have sent you my humble compliments at once.

"I wish you a long life and happiness.

"Lovely-Torture.

"P.S.—I was forgetting to tell you this: since you have deemed it necessary to kidnap my Lord and Master, I have likewise felt it my duty to put your wife in safe keeping. Don't look for her. You could never find her. The security of your well-beloved depends entirely upon that of my well-beloved. Torture for torture. Life for life. If your executioners send me one of the Master's fingers, you will receive without delay the right hand of your precious wife.

"Shanghai, the 5th day of the 7th moon."

Ho Chung's fury burst like a typhoon in the Yellow Sea. He seized a heavy whip and rushed at the wretched coolie, who had already fallen to his knees, ready to receive without protest a chastisement for something he had not done and of which he knew nothing. The soldier on guard had stepped aside indifferently to give his chief ample room to strike.

The lash cut into the coolie's back. It went aloft again and there, suddenly, it stopped. Ho Chung ordered the guard :

"Lock this man up and don't let him go until you hear from me !"

The trembling coolie got to his feet. He had expected a vicious whipping and he had only received one blow. He considered himself extremely fortunate. He staggered toward the guard and departed with something like a smile of satisfaction on his face.

Ho Chung sent for Tchao. The Cantonese appeared, astonished and disgruntled at having been summoned by his chief at the very moment when he was beginning to carry out the schedule of tortures prescribed for the first day.

"Come here," said Ho Chung. "What I am going to tell you is for your ears only."

Ho Chung's voice was harsh. Never before had he spoken in this tone. Tchao, who knew his race and could read sentiments behind the most impenetrable masks, saw at a glance that his chief was consumed with an indescribable rage. He followed him into the corner of the little hall which was lighted with a lamp borrowed from the temple.

Ho Chung showed the Cantonese the message which the prisoner's first concubine had sent him.

"Now do you understand why I interrupted you in the middle of your work? You can guess what would happen to my wife if the Second Madame knew what was going on in that underground passage?"

"Yes, chief."

The harelip's mouth was gaping. In his perplexity, he lacked for words. He finally murmured:

"But—but—that means we can't act! And—if we don't act, we'll probably die——"

"Quite so."

"What can we do?"

"That's what I've been asking myself ever since I read the words of that female fox. And I can see only one solution. We'll only be in command of the situation when we have that concubine in our hands."

"Yes, chief. We'll have to kidnap her."

"No! You succeeded the first time, thanks to Hsu. But now I suspect that Hsu has betrayed us. In spite of all our threats, he has talked too much! The proof—this letter of reprisals addressed to me. No! We can't rely on that young traitor. We'll deal with his case later on."

"But, if we can't kidnap the woman, how are we going to get her?"

"By a trick, Tchao. Always, by a trick. The wise man does not cross a shaky bridge with his eyes closed. It is not for us to go to that woman; it is for her to come to us!"

"But how will you ever induce her to throw herself between the tiger's jaws?"

"I won't and I couldn't, but the prisoner can and he will! I want you to go to him right now and tell him this with an air of great confidence: 'The General has decided to put you to death if you refuse to pay your heavy ransom. But there is someone here who wishes to help you. He can get you out of this for almost nothing. You must write yourself and seal with your own ring a message to Madame Lovely-Torture in Shanghai. You must instruct her to come personally at nine o'clock on Saturday night to the left bank of the Whangpoo in the front of the Min Hong bac. She must bring with her the paltry sum of 1,000 dollars. She must come alone, without notifying the police, and she must give the money to a man who will have your seal. This absurd sum is not a ransom. It will merely make it possible to buy the silence of the subordinates and, when your Second Madame has paid it over, you can escape. As you see, you'll be getting out of this mess for a song. But if you try to warn her not to come Saturday and if the man who bears your seal returns empty-handed, you will be decapitated with the saw as prescribed in the regulations.'"

"I understand, chief."

"This message will be taken to Shanghai by the coolie who just arrived. Do you see any flaws in my scheme? Think carefully."

The Cantonese closed his good eye and scratched the back of one of his hands. He said:

"Your wisdom is great, chief."

"I don't want any compliments."

"But it seems to me that you would be still more certain of snaring the woman if the prisoner were to write that he would be there himself to receive the money from her hands and to pay us."

"Excellent. But we are playing a dangerous game. We risk losing them both, and—if he ever escapes——"

"Chief, you have to free the falcon to catch the hare. And there is no better bait for the concubine than the presence of her man. If she comes to Min Hong and sees a stranger, she's liable to be frightened away at the last minute. But, if she recognises her husband, she will be convinced that there are no tricks being played."

"You're right beyond a doubt. But what if she comes with a squad of policemen?"

"We'll be prepared for that with two sections of soldiers, who'll intervene if they have to, but I'm sure that the policemen wouldn't run that risk for so little."

"I agree with you, Tchao. Your idea adds greatly to our chances of success."

"And who will command on Saturday night, chief?"

"I will!"

The Cantonese stared at Ho Chung, who repeated:

"Yes. I'll command. The capture of that she-fox interests me more than you know!"

CHAPTER VI

"YOU'RE IN THE CAGE! I'M NOT!"

THE big sails of the junks passed silently up and down the river in the heat of the night. The stars were shining brightly. On the far bank a few yellow lights outlined the village of Min Hong. It was one of those calm, limpid nights when it is impossible to conceive of tragedy, when one is convinced that human beings love one another and that, henceforth, on this peaceful earth, goodwill to men—and to women—will be the unwavering rule.

Ho Chung had arrived, accompanied by his escort, at eight in the evening. With the help of Tchao, he had laid his plans, foreseeing everything, calculating every chance of success or of disaster. Two truck-loads of Red infantrymen were hidden on either side of the road, near the farms, where the peasants took good care not to show themselves. Everything that is military imbues the average Chinese with a cringing fear.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, properly handcuffed and fettered, was waiting near the wall of a deserted house, about a hundred yards from the bac's pontoon. He was following to the letter the orders Tchao had given him. He was docile because he was a man who knew that the two rifles aimed at the middle of his back would fire if he made a move

which was not on the programme. He had gladly written the letter to Madame Lovely-Torture because he was persuaded that the miraculous aid which was going to make it possible for him to get out of this kidnapping experience with a few scratches and almost no expense could have only come from the emissaries of the opium ring.

Ho Chung and Tchao, hidden behind a sampan which had grounded near the appointed meeting-place, were watching the bac crossing back and forth. About ten minutes after nine, the Cantonese peeked over the top of the sampan and scrutinised with his valid eye the bac which was coming toward the left bank and was approximately in the middle of the river. The light of a junk fell on it in passing. Tchao touched Ho Chung's shoulder and whispered :

" Chief, there's only one passenger. It's a woman in dark clothes."

" You're sure she's alone ? "

" Yes. Except for the two boatmen."

" Then do as we've arranged."

The Cantonese disappeared into the shadows. When Ho Chung heard the chains of the anchor, he drew back slowly in the direction of the ruined house where his brother was waiting. Tchao had not been mistaken. A woman in a black dress, bare-headed, landed from the bac and, after a short hesitation, made out the house which had been described in the letter as the place of assignation.

Madame Lovely-Torture advanced with little steps but, apparently, she was not in the least dis-

turbed. Tchao, who had rejoined his prisoner, whispered to him :

"That's your wife. You see her? There—on the bank. Don't you see her?"

"Yes! Yes! There she is! I would know her anywhere——"

"Then call to her."

Ho Ta Wen asked nothing better.

"Good," said Tchao. "Now that she knows you're here, come back to the truck. We'll bring her to you and everything will be finished in no time at all."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, obeyed. Surrounded by four men, he hurried as fast as he could with his fetters to the waiting truck. He had done his part. Tchao had no further need of him.

Madame Lovely-Torture came forward faster now. She had recognised her husband's voice. She was impatient to reach that deserted dwelling where, no doubt, it would only take a few minutes to conclude the bargain. When she was a few yards from what was left of the door, she stopped suddenly. She was blinded by a powerful flashlight which struck her full in the eyes.

"Who is there?" she asked anxiously.

"Your husband's messenger," Ho Chung informed her quietly.

And, as he spoke, he turned his light on the palm of his other hand where Ho Ta Wen's signet ring was lying. This was the signal as arranged in the letter.

"All right. But where is my husband? I heard his voice a minute ago."

"He's waiting for you in the courtyard. Please step forward. You have the money, I trust?"

"Yes, I have it."

"Then advance. Everything will be just as we arranged."

Madame Lovely-Torture, who was unable to see the face of the man who kept pointing the flashlight in her direction, held tight to the envelope which contained the thousand precious dollars and obeyed. Just as she stepped through the doorway, Ho Chung made a sign to Tchao. Two men sprang up out of the darkness and, in less than no time, the Second Madame was gagged and bound.

"Take her to the truck," Tchao ordered.

"Wait!" Ho Chung commanded.

Always behind his flashlight which served him better than any mask, he approached Madame Lovely-Torture who, completely overpowered, was lying on the ground. Rage was burning in her black eyes as they tried to pierce the obscurity to identify her enemy. Without a word, Ho Chung examined her from head to foot, taking good care to let the light fall straight into her face for a few seconds. She was struggling desperately to free herself, and her long supple body writhed like a snake on the hard earth. She did her best to give utterance to horrible insults, but only the muscles of her mouth contracted. No sound penetrated the gag. Ho Chung burst out laughing and, showing Tchao and the other amused soldiers the helpless prisoner, he cried:

"Look at the viper! How she'd like to bite!

And she's trying to insult me! Would you believe it?"

One of the soldiers was eager to prod her in the thigh with his bayonet just to teach her to respect his chief, but Ho Chung pushed him away roughly and ordered:

"Don't you touch her, you fool! She's my property—I, alone, know how to handle vipers. Take her away in the other truck!"

Ho Chung extinguished his light. The soldiers went off with their perfumed burden. Tchao was left alone with his chief. They were two shadows in the night. The grasshoppers were shrilling in the hot obscurity. Suddenly, Ho Chung took the Cantonese by the arm.

"Good work, Tchao."

"You're contented, chief? We've succeeded."

"Yes, I am delighted. Now, we have them in our power. The General will be satisfied." He squeezed the arm of the Cantonese and added: "How do you like her? She's pretty, don't you think so!"

The harelip emitted a whistle and said:

"Jade of inestimable value, chief."

"She's even prettier than the beauty of the *Ten Thousand Delights*."

"I'm sure of that. But why, chief, do you talk to me about her?"

"Oh—— For nothing——"

There was a silence. Then, brusquely, Ho Chung pulled Tchao forward and said: "On our way! We'll be safer once we're back in our lines."

The following morning, Tchao came to find Ho Chung and announced :

" Chief, your orders have been executed. The carpenters have made a bamboo cage. It is six feet high and six feet long and six feet wide. They have put it in the north gallery of the underground passage."

" The ' fat rat ' can't see the cage from where he is ? "

" No. He's separated from it by the two walls which support the altar of Kwan-In."

" Excellent. Have you told Li that I want neither of the prisoners to have either tea or water ? "

" Li knows that."

" Then put the viper in her cage."

Tchao chortled, his eyes closed :

" A fat rat and a viper ! The General will think we love animals ! "

" Keep quiet, old bandit. Has Fong given a dollar to every man who took part in the expedition ? "

" Yes, chief."

" Are they happy ? "

" They would like to hunt vipers every night ! "

" I authorise you to send for the girl at the *Ten Thousand Delights* of Kong Chen Tchiao. But I advise you to pick a man who won't steal her from you on the way."

" I'd better go myself, chief."

" But you'll scare her to death. She won't come back with you."

" I'll have a club with me. She'll like my face better than my club."

"All right. Amuse yourself to-night while waiting for——"

"Waiting for what?"

"Never mind. Go and put the viper in her cage."

Ho Chung remained alone for half an hour. His heart was bubbling over with satisfaction. Now he had the pair of them at his mercy! After the terrible fury which Madame Lovely-Torture's letter had unchained, the certainty of vengeance and of being able to inflict a well-merited punishment relieved him immensely. Standing in the window in one of the rooms which gave on a garden of the monastery, he contemplated the blue sky, the green trees and the moss-covered tiles on the rooftops.

A stray dog crossed the garden, its tail between its legs, its back all skinned from disease. He whistled to it. He was about to take pity on the starving beast which the soldiers were maltreating, when Fong appeared.

"The prisoner is in her cage, but she's making an awful fuss about it."

"I'll go to see her."

He crossed the gallery. He stopped to listen to the song of a nightingale perched on a magnolia branch. Then he entered the temple of Kwan-In and went into the underground passage. Two soldiers were posted at the entrance. He took the direction opposite to that of the cellar in which Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was sequestered, and stopped on the threshold of the north gallery. The cage was standing there on the ground and looked

exactly like one of the bamboo cages in which wild beasts are transported when they are captured alive. The place was lighted by a narrow window cut in the wall of the foundation of the temple, which was surrounded by a deep and wide ditch.

At sight of him, Madame Lovely-Torture sprang to her feet. They observed each other without a word through the knotty bars. She looked at him savagely. Her little pointed teeth were clenched. Hatred was sweating through every pore of her skin. She looked and looked, but she did not speak. He made a very deliberate tour of the cage, his hands behind his back, like an interested visitor at the zoo. He stopped. He laughed silently. Then he recommenced his walk around the cage. He sensed that nothing could exasperate her quite so much. She followed him with her eyes as if she expected to see him fall, struck dead by the lightning of some invisible devil.

He stopped again. This time she drew close to him and, her hands gripping the bamboo bars, she hissed :

"I thought I recognised your voice last night. Now I see that I wasn't mistaken."

He stood facing her, his hands still behind his back, the same ironic smile on his face. He said :

"I thought I recognised your handwriting on the envelope—I was not mistaken."

"But you made a big mistake when you ordered your men to kidnap me."

"Really? I only wanted to place you near your beloved husband. Lovers should not sleep under different roofs."

And once again Ho Chung began his walk around the cage. He was happy because she was so completely helpless behind her bars. He delighted in enraging her still more with his silent laughter. Suddenly, she cried :

" I told you that you made a big mistake when you ordered your men to kidnap me ! "

" That's where we disagree. "

" You imagine that I'm in a cage. You're in the cage ! I'm not. You're absolutely at my mercy ! "

" Don't talk too much—it will make you thirsty. And here we don't drink, oh beautiful viper who spits in women's faces ! "

Once more the two little fists gripped the bars.

" You're at my mercy, I tell you ! You're at the mercy of a woman in a cage ! "

" Not so loud, " Ho Chung objected sarcastically. " Don't scream. Anybody would think you were being tortured already. "

" At my mercy ! Do you hear ? " She paused an instant. Then, she added in a lower tone : " Because my detention here will mean death for your wife—— "

The smile disappeared from Ho Chung's lips and he asked :

" What did you say ? "

" I've locked your monkey up where no one can find her. If I haven't returned by noon to-morrow, my *amah* will poison her. And there's no torture that will make me tell you where she is. Do you hear, cursed jackal ? This time, I've got her—your monkey with the yellow hair ! I foresaw the

possibility of a trap. You still have a night to reflect. To-morrow at noon, if I'm not at the place which I alone know, my *amah* will give your wife her last cup of tea."

Ho Chung was speechless. His prisoner had killed all his joy and destroyed all his confidence. His expressionless face hid his anguish. Without a word he left the gallery. He heard Madame Lovely-Torture calling after him :

"Traitor! Rotten son of a tortoise! You think I'm in your power! But, you're in the cage! I'm not!"



The way a wounded animal seeks for shelter, Ho Chung, coming out of the underground passage, hid behind the great bronze statue of the Buddha, against the polychromatic retable where all the monsters and all the devils of the Chinese iconography exhibited their hideousness and their contortions.

Under a water nymph, carved in the wood and painted pale pink, he was alone and he could think. This last retort from Madame Lovely-Torture meant that he must act quickly and surely. It was no longer a question of days but of hours. It was no longer only his own life, threatened by the implacable General, that was in danger. It was also the existence of Paulette, threatened by the vengeance of the concubine.

What to do? Rush to Shanghai? Hope to find Paulette in a single night? Pure folly! It was evident that Madame Lovely-Torture had not hidden her anywhere on the premises of the family

home. Only a long investigation would suffice to discover her. And even then——

Ho Chung calculated that it took about four hours to reach Shanghai by automobile. Therefore, it was imperative that he learn the exact whereabouts of his wife before eight in the morning. And, for that, Madame Lovely-Torture must be made to speak with the dawn.

And, to make her speak, there remained only torture. She had boasted that she would resist until noon, that she would suffer anything until her *amah* had carried out the sentence. There was nothing for it but to see if she could make good her boast. Ho Chung doubted it because his inventive brain had already thought of a method which had every chance of succeeding.

Rapidly now, he passed like a shadow before the dusty visages of the scowling demons, ran across the garden of the fountain of the Phoenix and called Tchao and Li. For a considerable time, he whispered orders to his attentive aids. The Cantonese and Li, the former acrobat of Fouchow, listened with their heads thrust forward and their hands hidden in their sleeves. When Ho Chung had finished his instructions, the two agents looked at one another. It was easy to read on their faces the happy anticipation of a choice spectacle at which they were to assist both as actors and as members of the audience.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHAPLET OF " DRAGONS' EYES "

HO CHUNG, a unique judge, was seated before a small black table which Tchao had placed in the underground passage. He was directly beneath the altar of the goddess, between the two supporting walls, in a sort of improvised alcove. On his right, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was incarcerated ; on his left, beyond the wall, stood the bamboo cage, obstructing the north gallery.

The séance had commenced at nine in the evening with the trial of the male prisoner. After the stupefaction of the first minute, a flood of insults had poured from the mouth of the " fat rat " and Ho Chung had listened without batting an eyelash. Whenever the elder brother paused for breath, Ho Chung signed to Li, who at once administered a solid blow in the back with a heavy club. Whereupon Ho Ta Wen groaned in pain and swore louder than before. But, at last, words failed him and he fell back exhausted on his stool, his shoulder-blades bleeding and swollen, sweat running down his round face.

Only then did Ho Chung speak. His calm was astonishing. There was no passion in his even voice as he said :

" The General in command of the Third Red

Army decided to kidnap you and hold you for ransom. You dared to laugh in his face when you were invited politely to make the offer of an honourable sum. Had I not intervened, you would already have been decapitated and your fat body would have been devoured by stray dogs. But, fortunately for you, the General allowed me to take charge of the affair. And I have only intervened because, although I have every right to avenge myself on you and yours, I desire to spare you pain and, eventually, death."

"Be quiet, you good-for-nothing wretch! You have taken advantage of me to trap my well-beloved wife."

Li raised his club to strike, but Ho Chung stopped him with a wave of his hand as he said:

"The cries of the 'fat rat' do not disturb me. Wait for my orders." And, addressing his brother, he went on: "I said that I had intervened to bring you to reason. You are in our power. Your concubine is likewise in our hands. You will both be executed at noon to-morrow, by order of the General, if you insist upon preferring your gold to your life."

"Never will either you or your chief touch my possessions! Never will I give a sapek to fatten red pigs like you!"

"Then you prefer torture—followed by death?"

"Du She Wei and his friends are aware of my misfortune. They are coming to set us free. Look out for their just reprisals."

"Before your accomplices of the opium ring get here, you will be a carcass fit only for rats and dogs."

"You can kill me! Not a sapek for you, bandit!"

"Very well. Since you insist, we shall be forced to change your point of view."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, held out to his brother his two chained fists. The thumbs were covered with coagulated blood. He cried:

"They've already put thorns under my nails! I'm not afraid of your executioners!"

Ho Chung gave Tchao the order to take the prisoner back to his cellar.

"And then," he said, "you can bring me the woman in the cage. But, before you let her out, handcuff her and chain her feet. I don't trust that viper."



Madame Lovely-Torture appeared. Her costly black silk dress was rumpled and soiled. Her disordered hair fell over her narrow, oblique brows. Her mouth was very red, not with rouge, but because she had been biting her lips incessantly.

She came forward, dragging her feet. She had great difficulty in walking because the fetters cut her thin silk stockings and bruised her delicate ankles. She stopped, a provoking expression on her face, in front of the black table. The oil lamp threw its crude light on her. She was really beautiful in her rage, beautiful as a panther ready to spring.

Calmer than ever, like an examiner weary of questioning applicants, Ho Chung waved her to silence as she began to hurl insults at him. He said:

"You told me a little while ago that you had sequestered my wife."

"That's what I said."

"You also told me that, if you had not returned by noon to-morrow, she would be poisoned."

"That's what I said."

"In your own interest, I advise you to tell me where you have hidden her."

"Never! You can cut off my hands, tear out my eyes—anything—but I won't tell. Never, Never!"

"Very well. Having anticipated your stubborn attitude, I have prepared a little pastime which your name inspired——"

Ho Chung volunteered no details. He said to Li:

"Put her back in her cage."

Madame Lovely-Torture struggled with Li. She repeated fiercely:

"I won't speak—I won't——"

"We'll know more about that at dawn. Obey that man!"

She disappeared. Ho Chung heard the squeaking of the bamboo door as it closed on her. He called the Cantonese who was waiting for orders and said:

"Now, Tchao, the ceremony is going to begin. Do the essential. But first bring me the iron spike and the bowl of 'dragons' eyes.' Let me know when everything is ready. In the meantime I'm going to decipher some dispatches with Fong."

* * *

Half an hour later, Ho Chung returned to the underground passage. It had been silent before, but now there was an undercurrent of voices.

Twenty soldiers had been placed in the gallery opposite the cage and they were snickering and laughing in evident excitement.

Ho Chung sat down once more at his table. He was flanked by Tchao and Li. He made sure that all his orders had been carried out meticulously.

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, extracted from his cellar, was upright against a beam which stood between the wall and the north gallery. He could not help but see everything that happened in the bamboo cage.

Turning to the Cantonese, Ho Chung asked in a whisper :

" You remember what I said to you about the viper ? "

" Yes, chief."

Tchao's good eye was flaming with passion.

" And I promised you, for to-night, the beauty from the *Ten Thousand Delights* of Kong Chen Tchiao——"

" Yes, chief."

" Well, I'm going to give you an even more important piece of jade." And Ho Chung nodded in the direction of the cage, invisible behind the wall.

The harelip grunted in delighted surprise.

" Hompff! Chief—you—you really mean that I—that I can——"

" Yours is a prior right. You are going to be the first to taste of the charms of the viper. It is considered very precious jade. Amuse yourself——"

The Cantonese did not wait to be told a second time. He followed Ho Chung, who left his table, passed in front of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, who was

motionless against the beam, and stopped in front of the cage.

Madame Lovely-Torture had sprung to her feet at their approach. But Ho Chung waved to her not to disturb herself, and said :

“ Lie down again.”

Madame Lovely-Torture, who had anticipated nothing of the kind, turned quickly to look at the Cantonese. The sight of this monster, with all his bestiality concentrated in one eye, with his harelip glaring above his yellow teeth, caused her to cry out in horror. Ho Chung immobilised Tchao's hand as he was about to open the door. He asked Madame Lovely-Torture for the last time :

“ And you still refuse to speak ? ”

As no reply was forthcoming, he literally pushed the Cantonese into the cage and ordered :

“ All right ! Amuse yourself with that she-fox ! ”

He himself, being neither vicious nor sadistic, turned on his heel and, as he passed his brother, said :

“ You're about to see what it costs a man to love his gold better than anything else in the world.”

He walked slowly back to his table and sat down. He did not want to see the spectacle, but he could see its reflection in his brother's bulging eyes, because Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, was going to be compelled to witness a form of torture not yet included on the official list prepared by Teng Fah.

When Tchao entered the cage, Madame Lovely-Torture screamed again. Ho Chung heard not only her cry but the noise of the struggle which ensued. It was like a battle to the death between two wild

beasts in a cage. The bamboo squeaked beneath the weight of the two bodies. Heels beat the ground, toes dug holes in the damp earth and the Cantonese' efforts were punctuated by his gasps for breath. Ho Chung listened to all this without changing his expression or moving from his seat. His hand plunged nervously into a bowl and cracked some peanuts which he proceeded to eat with his eyes fixed on his elder brother's death-like face.

At last he heard the shock of a fall and then the ripping of silk. This was followed by a comparative silence which was only broken by the soldiers in the opposite gallery. One of them spit. A dry cough followed. There was a new silence which was only interrupted by Ho Chung's fingers, still cracking peanut shells.

He chewed slowly, his eyes half-closed as he ceaselessly watched his brother who was panting with rage and disgust and pity for his concubine and for his own helplessness. Nevertheless, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, did not say a single word.

Several minutes passed. Ho Chung said to Li :

"Go and see if that's over."

The acrobat from Fouchow slipped along the wall and looked into the cage. He came back and reported :

"Yes, chief. It's all over."

At the same moment, they heard the bamboo door open and close. Tchaò reappeared. Ho Chung said to him :

"Give the key to Li—it's his turn."

The enchanted acrobat grabbed the key and ran for the cage. Then Ho Chung stood up. He took

a "dragon's eye" from the bowl on the table, fixed it on the iron spike, and announced quietly :

"One."

*
*
*

Ho Chung was still seated at his small black table. It was almost one o'clock in the morning. Tchao had replenished the stock of dried seeds. The iron spike was standing beside the lamp. By this time it had pierced seventeen "dragons' eyes." There were still three soldiers in the gallery, waiting for their turn.

Suddenly, Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, who appeared to be almost unconscious, called to his brother in a choking voice. Ho Chung walked over to his prisoner and asked :

"You wish to speak to me?"

"I—I—will pay one million dollars if we are liberated immediately—both of us."

"To begin with, you must pay four and not one million. Furthermore, you know that she has hidden my wife. Will she tell me where? Ask her."

"But you can't allow such an atrocity to continue. I beg you for her sake—I implore you!"

"It's no good imploring me. Ask her if she is ready to tell me where she has hidden my wife."

Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, obeyed. But his exhortation was so much wasted breath because, from the shadows of the cage, there came a voice which was savage, terrible to hear, a tired voice but one which was still animated by the determination not to give in :

"No! No! Never! His monkey will die at noon to-morrow!"

The stubbornness of Madame Lovely-Torture acted on Ho Chung like an electric shock. His calm left him suddenly. His fury burst, a fury so terrible that he seized the whip from Li's hand and beat his brother's face and body until he was striped like a zebra. He had lost his mind. He grabbed Tchao by the collar of his tunic and yelled:

"Did you hear her? Ah! So she won't tell! All right! You run like the devil and call out all the men in the camp—the entire company. And, if you have to, get another company to serve as a reserve. Ah! So it's impossible to satisfy that bitch from Nankin! Li, get me fifteen iron spikes and a whole sack of 'dragons' eyes!' She'll have it until dawn, until I've a chaplet of two hundred beads on this table before me! And, if, with the first light of day, she has still not spoken, you are to beat her stomach with a bamboo rod until she bursts!"

Ho Chung finished speaking just as a soldier quit the cage and picked up his rifle to go back to his post. In his rage, Ho Chung pulled the automatic out of his hands and advanced toward the cage. He was about to fire when Tchao took his arm and cried:

"Chief! You must not kill her! If you do, she won't be able to speak!"

Ho Chung stared blankly at the Cantonese. He handed him the rifle and admitted:

"You're right—I lost my temper. But hurry and get me some more men!"

Ho Chung accompanied Tchao on this mission. They went out into the courtyard of the temple. The fresh night air quickly cleared Ho Chung's brain. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and remarked :

"Thank you, old bandit. Without you, I'd have made a fatal mistake. Thank you."

"While she's alive, chief, we can hope."

* * *

In the dark pagoda, the goddess Kwan-In, goddess of good and evil, stood in all the serenity of a millenary statue. Fifteen feet beneath the ground, exactly under the revered altar, an infernal orgy was taking place. Eighty soldiers, aroused from their sleep for an un hoped-for recreation, were packed into the gallery, impatient to penetrate that cage which contained such priceless joy. Some of the men were like famished beasts. They were unable to wait their turn ; they fought with their comrades to get into the north gallery. Tchao and Li, armed with whips, had the greatest difficulty in maintaining anything like order in the ranks.

Ho Chung himself had been forced to intervene, revolver in hand, and threaten the surly ones with a bullet in the head if they insisted on attacking that cage.

The heat in the underground passage was damp and suffocating. There was an odour of flesh, sweat and filth. Ho Chung sat there, mechanically adding a "dragon's eye" to an iron spike every time a man quit the cage.

And, each time a soldier entered, Tchao hit Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, a stinging blow with a bamboo

rod to bring him to his senses and make him appreciate the terrible hell to which his well-beloved wife was being subjected.

Ho Chung motioned to Tchao and asked him :

" Does she look as if she might talk now ? "

The Cantonese shook his head as he murmured :

" No, chief. Not yet——"

" She's not dead ? "

" No ! Oh, no, she's not dead. She bites and struggles. The viper still has venom to spit out."

While Tchao was talking to him, Ho Chung noticed a man who had just come down into the underground passage and was hurrying toward them. Ho Chung cried :

" What's that man doing here ? Once ought to be enough ! Drive him out of this with your whips ! "

The Cantonese rushed at the newcomer with his arm raised. He ordered :

" *Get* out of here, you corpse ! Haven't you had enough ? "

The soldier explained :

" The men on guard on the road have just arrested a suspect. Shall we bring him to the chief ? "

Ho Chung signed to the soldier to approach and asked :

" What's that ? A suspect ? Where ? "

" On the road. A white devil. He's come from Shanghai."

" What ! A white ? You're sure ? "

" He speaks Chinese but he's a Russian and he wants to see you."

Ho Chung was on his feet in a flash. He cried :

“ Where is he ? The Russian ? ”

“ At the little outpost at the entrance to the valley.”

“ Run as fast as you can and bring him to me ! ”

CHAPTER VIII

LEONIDOFF'S INITIATIVE

HO CHUNG'S heart stopped beating for a second when he saw Leonidoff, the blonde giant of the Russian guard, being led into the courtyard of the Monastery. There could be no doubt but what this man had come to bring him news of Paulette. He grasped both his hands in his and, without a word of preamble, cried :

" My wife ! You know something ? "

" Master Ho Chung, if I've been driving half the night like a madman in the Elder Master's automobile, it must be because I have something serious to communicate to you which concerns your wife."

" She's still alive ? "

" Yes. She's still alive. Perhaps you don't know yet that the Second Madame kidnapped her to avenge the——"

" I know—— I know——"

And Ho Chung rapidly described the events of the last forty-eight hours. He concluded :

" Now you can understand, my good Leonidoff, why your miraculous arrival gives me new hope. I am doing the impossible to make that viper talk, but so far she has refused absolutely to reveal the hiding-place of her victim."

The Russian chuckled :

"Why should you waste your time trying to make her tell you her secret when that's what I've come all this distance to find you for?"

Ho Chung started and his face was transfigured. He exclaimed:

"What? You know where Paulette is hidden? Please tell me everything! But you're covered with sweat and you must be tired out. I'll have them serve you some saké and some fruit. And you can speak freely in front of my men because none of them understand any French."

Leonidoff took off his tunic and, as he peeled a mandarine, he began:

"Last Monday, about six in the evening, I was on guard at the main entrance. We were lounging around, still discussing the kidnapping of the Master, who was spirited away from us by a trick and thanks to the complicity of Hsu, the secretary, at the temple of the Perfumed Hill. We were waiting for orders from Madame Lovely-Torture, the only person in the whole establishment who had kept her head. It was, as I've said, about six in the evening. All of a sudden I saw Apple-Blossom come in. That didn't surprise me, but I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that Madame Ho Chung was with her. During the year since you've been away, we've heard the most fantastic tales about you both. Some said that you were an officer in the Red Army and others that you'd completely abandoned your wife, and they added—forgive me if I tell you what I've heard—that she was frequently seen on the streets of the French Concession at night. Naturally, I didn't pay any attention to

the nasty gossip. To begin with, I know you both too well for that. Anyway, you can imagine my astonishment when I saw Madame Ho Chung enter the residence with Apple-Blossom. I bowed to her. I scarcely need to tell you that I've always had the sincerest sympathy for that poor woman who was maltreated, from the very beginning, and often without your knowledge, in your brother's home. She recognised me at once, and said: 'Leonidoff, the Second Madame has something awful to tell me about my husband—I'm afraid there's been a catastrophe.' I did my best to reassure her. She followed Apple-Blossom into the Court of the Sycamores. Two long hours passed. As I was passing near the main gate, I saw a Chinese girl trying to stick her head in between the bars. I approached. It was your brave servant, Perforated-Lotus. She explained her fears for her mistress and it was then that I began to wonder what Madame Ho Chung could be doing for so long. I finally decided that there was probably some dirty work going on. Nothing seemed more logical. Madame Lovely-Torture had accused the Reds of the kidnapping from the start and she had insisted that you were at the bottom of the plot. So I argued that it was natural enough for her to imprison your wife and hold her as a sort of hostage. The whole thing seemed as plain as day to me, but I couldn't be sure. I made a tour around the property. Nobody knew anything. I told Perforated-Lotus to come back in the morning."

Leonidoff paused to swallow a large cup of tea at one gulp. Then he continued:

"I was worried. Perhaps you remember that I was all upset when I saw you leave the family home that night with your wife? And that I told you that you were leaving a good friend behind?"

"Yes, Leonidoff, I can still hear your voice through the gate. And your words were a great comfort to me that night."

"Well, then. It was eleven o'clock and I was about to make a second round when Liang, the major-domo, came out and gave some orders to the chauffeur in my presence. Of course, Madame Lovely-Torture had sent him—I heard everything. She wanted, not the open, but the closed car outside the entrance of the Court of the Pines and she wanted the main gate left open. There was no doubt left in my mind. She intended to carry off her prisoner under cover of the darkness. It was a fine opportunity for me. I took one of the motor-cycles and waited outside in one of the little streets at the corner of the avenue. A few minutes later I saw the headlights. It was the Master's old black limousine. Even the curtains were drawn inside. I followed at a safe distance, without lights. Instead of going into the Concession, she took the Columbia Country Club road, crossed the railroad near the University of Kwang Hwa and, about a mile and three quarters out in the country, suddenly turned into a rough road bordered with deep ditches. I hid my motor-cycle and followed on foot because I was sure the limousine couldn't go far over such ground. I was right. It soon stopped outside a low, undulating wall, encircling a garden at the back of which stood a dilapidated

pagoda and a small peasant's house. Hidden by a corn field, I reached the wall and watched two women in black get out of the car. One of them was bundled up as if it had been the dead of winter. I recognised the Second Madame and I knew your wife by her blonde hair. There was nothing more for me to do. I now was sure of the hiding-place. I ran back through the corn, jumped on my motor-cycle and rode like the devil back to the residence, where Madame Lovely-Torture found me at my post when she arrived a little later. That was one night that wasn't wasted ! "

" Then you know exactly where to find Paulette ? "

" Wait. Early the next morning I saw Perforated Lotus lurking around the front of the house. I took her into the garage and told her what I had discovered. In the meantime, I had done some thinking. There were several ways of helping your wife. Perforated-Lotus could have gone and notified the French Consulate, but everything had taken place outside the limits of the Concession and I knew that the Consul-General had no authority to send a guard to liberate her in Chinese territory. He could only inform the Chinese chief of police of Greater Shanghai and ask him to act urgently on behalf of a Frenchwoman who had married a Chinese. I don't have to tell you anything about Chinese administrative methods. They would have commenced by conducting an investigation at the Master's house. And what would Madame Lovely-Torture have done ? "

" She would have immediately put my wife somewhere else."

"Exactly. And, two or three days later, the Chinese police would have found nothing in the peasant's house and would have made a report elaborating on the stupidity of the French authorities. Worse still, I feared that Madame Lovely-Torture might vent her wrath on Madame Ho Chung in an irreparable manner. I therefore decided to say nothing."

"And you were wise, Leonidoff, but, since I have captured that viper, things have changed. The life or the death of my wife is now only a question of hours."

"I know that, too—little Perforated-Lotus told me. Because you haven't heard all my story. When I had explained to the servant exactly where to find her mistress, I told her to go and see what she could see and come back as soon as possible. I knew that Perforated-Lotus would arouse no suspicions and that she was by far the best person to take charge of the situation. She wandered around and got a big basket of vegetables and then went into the garden where the old *amah*, who was sitting on the doorstep, cursed her thoroughly. She asked if the farmer Wang lived in the neighbourhood. Briefly, she engaged the old woman in a conversation—I had told her to act like a half-wit. So Perforated-Lotus generously offered some of her vegetables to the *amah*, who accepted them and said: 'You are doing me a great service because I've got a sick person to look after and I can't leave the house.' Your servant sat down and prepared the vegetables for cooking. The *amah*, suspecting nothing, went about a hundred yards off to a little

pond to wash them. Perforated-Lotus slipped along the wall and saw a narrow window at about a man's height from the ground. Climbing up on a little hill of stones which she quickly piled together, she was able to distinguish your wife lying on a wooden bed. She called to her. Your wife jumped up, overcome with joy at the sound of the voice of your devoted little servant. Perforated-Lotus encouraged her all she could, told her that I knew where to find her and that everything would be done to free her at the first possible opportunity. The old woman came back from the pond with her vegetables and found your servant sitting just where she had left her. They chatted for some time. Perforated-Lotus contrived to question her in a stupid fashion as if she was only talking to hear herself talk. One thing led to another until the old *amah* confided that she was caring for a sick friend of Madame Lovely-Torture and—listen carefully to this, Master Ho Chung—that Madame Lovely-Torture had told her textually this: 'This lady is in the family way and she desires to rid herself of the complication. If you don't see me before such and such a day at noon, you are to make some tea and pour this medicine into her cup. It is excellent for women who don't wish to become mothers.' When I heard this, I was in a terrible state of agitation. I was powerless to take the responsibility of intervening personally to liberate your wife. I finally came to the conclusion that, since there was still time, the best thing was to advise you because, after all, you have certain facilities for taking radical steps——"

" Leonidoff, all I can tell you is that this unexpected assistance from you is a miracle in my eyes, and that I am profoundly grateful to you. My wife's life is saved and no longer depends on the caprice of that viper I have placed in a bamboo cage——"

Ho Chung turned because someone, standing in the doorway, was motioning to him excitedly. Ho Chung asked :

" Who is there ? What do you want ? "

It was the Cantonese who was evidently in a great hurry to talk to his chief.

" Ah ! Tchao. What's happened ? "

" Chief ! I've just been down there. The ' fat rat ' has talked to me—I think he's gone crazy or else he's suddenly coming to his senses. He says he'll pay all the ransom ! "

" What ! You're sure ! You're certain there's no mistake ! "

" Yes—I'm absolutely positive. But come and see for yourself, chief. Quickly—we've got him on his knees at last ! "

Leonidoff would have liked to follow Ho Chung but he did not dare. The latter went with the Cantonese into the underground passage. The Russian sat down and waited as patiently as he could. Ho Chung soon returned. He was radiant with joy. His whole face was alight with triumph as he announced :

" Tchao was right. The bloated Lord of Opium was given in after all ! I found him almost out of his mind. He has seen enough of the performance I staged for his benefit. He's going to sign and seal

an authorisation to enter his house and take four million dollars from his coffers. Four million is our price for the liberty of that charming couple. I'm taking the additional precaution of making him sign a paper for his family, advising them that, if they make any opposition to my agent or if they warn the police and if the agent has not returned to Hangchow by seven in the evening, Madame Lovely-Torture and Ho Ta Wen will be tortured and decapitated at sunset."

"It seems to me that you have provided for every contingency."

"My good Leonidoff, I am going to ask you to drive me into Shanghai. I am going to take Tchao and Li with me. We'll collect the ransom money and we'll liberate my wife and I'll be able to be at the headquarters of the General commanding the Third Red Army this evening to hand over to him the funds I promised to the Cause. Leonidoff, I owe everything to you. I swear to you on the memory of my revered father that, if ever I can do anything for you, you can count on me until there's not a drop of blood left in my body."

The Russian giant sipped his tea and said, as he rose to his feet:

"Master Ho Chung, when I told you that you had a good friend in your brother's house, I meant what I said!"

A quarter of an hour later, Ho Chung, Leonidoff, Tchao and Li left the Monastery and hurried off in the direction of the automobile which had been left by the roadside. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had

signed and affixed his seal to all the necessary papers. The handful of soldiers that had not had access to the bamboo cage had come up from the underground passage, cursing their bad luck. Madame Lovely-Torture, nearly naked, bruised and cut, almost unconscious, had been left lying on her back, crying out meaningless words, rolling around like a person with convulsions.

The night was black for the sky was overcast. The four men were running through the valley from the Monastery toward the road. Suddenly, a soldier caught up to them and panted:

"Chief! Fong says the colonel wants you on the telephone!"

"Say that I'll be absent until noon."

"But, chief, Fong said to tell you that it's an urgent matter. It seems that the Nationalists are waking up at last!"

The four men stared at each other through the night. There was nothing for it but to get the latest news. They retraced their steps. Ho Chung picked up the field telephone which connected him with General Headquarters. He heard the voice of Colonel Fu Tso, chief of the General Staff, saying:

"Is that you, Ho Chung? I've bad news! We have just intercepted a message from the commander-in-chief of the Eighteenth Nationalist Army to the commander of the Hangchow garrison. Apparently, our comrades of the Fourth and Fifth Armies have been unable to follow up their advances, because four divisions have suddenly arrived to reinforce the Nankin troops which are now marching day and night to protect Shanghai. That being

the case, the General has decided not to take Hangchow and to change his front immediately so as to avoid all possibility of being flanked. Hello? You hear me? At dawn to-morrow morning, the Third Army will march in a north-westerly direction along the Hangchow-Chang-Sing-Nankin road. Get everything ready to break camp at dawn and send spies into the Woosung-Shanghai region. I want to be informed as to the strength of the forces protecting the city. Telephone me at seven to-night."

Ho Chung dropped the receiver and informed his comrades of what he had heard. He concluded:

"That means we've got to hurry more than ever. Now we're bound to have trouble because, more than likely, the Nationalists have already established their outposts along the way."

CHAPTER IX

DEAD MEAN TELL NO TALES

WITH Leonidoff in the driver's seat, the automobile had reached the bank of the river without difficulty. It was four o'clock in the morning. In the East, in the direction of the estuary of the Yang Tse, there was a violent thunderstorm, for the black horizon was torn with lightning. Sudden gusts of wind raised thick clouds of dust and riled the surface of the river.

Leonidoff, headlights extinguished, stopped about a hundred yards from the landing. He hailed the two young boatmen whose bac was moored nearby :

"Ho there ! Can we cross ? We have an automobile."

"Ha ! Ha ! The old uncle wants to cross. Have you a safe-conduct ? "

"Why should I have a safe-conduct ? "

"Because, this night, there are soldiers in the village on the other shore. You need papers to be allowed to land at Min Hong."

"Since when ? "

"I've just told you, old uncle ! Since a few hours ! "

"What's to prevent us crossing without papers ? We can explain when we get to the other side."

"Thanks very much, old uncle ! You don't care

if we get a sound beating from the chief of the detachment, I suppose. No. No thanks ! ”

“ Have they sentinels on the bank ? ”

“ So it seems. ”

“ Soldiers on the other shore ? ” Ho Chung muttered perplexedly. “ The Nationalists already ! But we’ve got to get across—no matter how ! ”

Leonidoff added :

“ And we’ve got to get the car over too ! Otherwise, God knows how we’ll ever get to Shanghai on time ! It must be eighteen miles. We can’t walk that ! ”

“ A sampan would do for us, but we’ve got to have a bac for the car. ”

Tchao, arriving at the only possible conclusion, interrupted :

“ Chief, we’ll simply have to take the bac by force and manœuvre it so as to land below Min Hong. You’ll admit that it’s not likely that they’ve got guards two or three miles down the river. ”

“ Tchao’s right. Listen, Leonidoff, drive on to the bac. We can’t stay here for ever on account of those two imbeciles ! ”

The automobile advanced. As it reached the planks which formed a passage from the bac to the shore, the boatmen started to protest vigorously. Tchao and Li threatened them with revolvers and informed them :

“ We are only going to borrow your bac, you young fools ! ”

“ But—but—it’s forbidden to—— ”

“ Keep quiet ! We’ll leave your precious boat somewhere below the town on the other bank. We

are acting under orders from our Chief! Do you see him?"

The boatmen looked at Ho Chung who, seemingly indifferent to this discussion, ordered:

"Give a dollar to each of those men. But be quick about it. If they refuse to listen to reason, throw them into the river!"

Tchao produced two pieces of silver from an inside pocket of his tunic and grumbled:

"Here! For you. And you. Now keep your tongues from wagging. You didn't see us! Understand? You don't know what happened to your bac."

"But you're going to take it away from us!"

"Yes, but you don't know that. You can say it broke loose from its moorings. You can fetch it at dawn. Come on now! Hurry!"

The bewildered boatmen pocketed the money and undid the chains. The current propelled the bac which, steered by Li and Tchao with oars, got out into the middle of the river.

"The problem now," said Leonidoff, "is to pick a possible landing-place for the car and one where there won't be any Nationalists."

The wind was strong. The bac gained speed and nearly collided with a junk which bore no lights.

"Ho-oh!" called the owner of the junk.

"Ho-oh!" responded Li.

"Need any help? Can't you handle her?"

"No. We're all right. Don't bother."

Little by little they manœuvred the bac towards the opposite shore. The low houses of the village

of Min Hong were lost to view. Ho Chung studied the bank and said :

" I don't see a sign of life."

" Neither do I," said Leonidoff, " but I can never get the automobile through that shifting sand. We've got to look farther along."

Tchao and Li pulled on their long oars. They followed the shore as close as possible, always seeking for a favourable spot to land. Imprudent as it was, Leonidoff switched on his headlights and spied a pebble beach which appeared a choice of evils. They threw down their planks and immobilised the bac. Fortunately, the ground was solid enough to support the weight of the motor. In first speed, with his three companions pushing from behind, Leonidoff pulled up the slope.

Ho Chung was inwardly rejoicing when they were alarmed by excited cries. A group of soldiers from the Seventh Nationalist Division came up to them on the run. The officer in command ordered :

" Halt ! Who are you ? "

" Service of Inspection of the Customs ! " the tricky Cantonese replied without a second's hesitation.

The officer approached, carrying a lantern. His men surrounded the four comrades. He asked :

" And your passes ? "

Ho Chung, as prompt as Tchao, explained :

" We are accompanying His Excellency the High Commissioner of Customs to Shanghai."

And, very respectfully, he designated the expressionless Leonidoff.

The Russian giant's face was white and his hair

was blond. It was simple for him to be mistaken for an Englishman. The officer seemed to be convinced but he insisted :

“ But where are His Excellency's papers ? ”

“ We handed them over at the pontoon of Min Hong. The officer commanding the detachment has them. But the current is so strong to-night that the bac broke away from its moorings and we've had a devil of a time saving our automobile. You can be sure we didn't land here on purpose.”

The Chinese officer hesitated. All this was plausible enough. But suddenly he asked :

“ And the boatmen ? Where are they ? ”

“ They were left behind on the bank.”

“ That's odd ! ”

“ We would like to get going because His Excellency is in a great hurry to reach Shanghai.”

“ I cannot let you pass until I've seen the papers which you say you left with the commander of the detachment at Min Hong. I'll send a man for them. You can wait here.”

Ho Chung did some fast calculating : three miles there and three miles back. It would be at least two hours before the messenger could return and report that there was not one word of truth in their story. Two hours wasted to finally determine the arrest of four travellers. No, it was clear that there was nothing for it but to risk everything immediately. He bowed politely to the officer and remarked :

“ I quite understand that you want to verify our papers, but you'll be causing us to lose two valuable hours. I am going to ask His Excellency to be

good enough to take you with us to Min Hong. When you have examined the papers, we'll bring you back here and we'll continue on our way. We can do the round trip in fifteen or twenty minutes."

The officer still seemed hesitant. Finally, he replied :

"Very well, on the condition that I can have an armed man with me."

"I see no objection. Will you permit me to ask His Excellency ?"

Ho Chung turned to Leonidoff and, with an attitude of profound respect, said in French :

"You heard what I told that pig. He's going to come with us and bring a soldier with him. When we get a couple of miles down the road we'll stall the motor and we'll find a way to get rid of them."

"That's our only chance," Leonidoff agreed grimly.

Ho Chung, like a scrupulous interpreter, announced to the officer :

"His Excellency invites you and one of your men to get into the car."

They had some difficulty getting started, but with the aid of the eight men of the patrol the wheels finally drew out of the mud and slime.

Ho Chung had had no opportunity to speak to Tchao or Li, but they had understood certain rapid signs he had made. They understood that, at a given moment, their unwelcome guests were to be thrown out or killed in cold blood.

Tchao was driving while Leonidoff sat pompously in the place of honour. The officer was squeezed in between the big Russian and Ho Chung and the soldier, clutching his rifle, was in front beside the Cantonese. Li, the acrobat, was on the running-board.

The car bumped along. It was raining now and anyone but Tchao would have probably lost the way. He, happily, knew the region well. When he reached a fork, he knew that he had only to turn to the right to reach the main road. Instead, he contrived to stall his engine and cursed :

"Son of a fox ! Water in the carburettor !"

As he got out, he pushed Li's elbow. When the soldier jumped down, Li tripped him. The man dropped his gun. The acrobat grabbed it up and stunned the soldier with a well-timed blow with the stock. The officer had stood up and his hand was already on his revolver. But Leonidoff paralysed both his arms, got the automatic away from him and floored him with a vicious crack on the forehead. Tchao, who had lifted the hood, looked up and asked :

"Have you got that pair of pigs in hand ?"

"Yes !" Li exclaimed with a laugh. "They'll sleep a good half-hour before they do any more grunting."

"Leonidoff ! You drive ! We've got a free road ahead !" Ho Chung was excited.

But the Cantonese protested :

"Chief ! Don't take any risks ! If they wake up in a few minutes they'll run all the way to Min Hong and they may be able to cut us off. Leave

them to me, chief. Dead men tell no tales. Give me a hand, Li."

The two men took the officer and the soldier and without the slightest hesitation, threw them into the river. As Tchao climbed into the car, he remarked with satisfaction :

" That makes two less ! Too bad we can't notify Nankin to cross them off the list ! "

Leonidoff was soon speeding through the night. Tchao, who was seated beside Ho Chung, wiped his hands on the cushions and murmured :

" Satisfied, chief ? "

" Yes, old bandit. That's fine work ! "

The grey streak of dawn was in the East. The rain was hitting like a typewriter on the top of the car.

* * *

It was seven in the morning when the four travellers, having encountered no further difficulties, stopped in sight of the pagoda of Sung Ka Zah. There were not more than a mile and a half from the French Concession. Ho Chung had done some thinking on the way. He declared :

" In the event that we have been described as the perpetrators of the Min Hong accident, it's perhaps wiser for us to separate. I suggest that we split the work up between us. Leonidoff and I will go and liberate my wife. We won't have any difficulty in scaring the old *amah* half to death and we'll take her prisoner away from her in no time. You, Tchao, and you, Li, can go on foot to the family house and wait for us, because I am the only one who knows how to open my brother's safes."

"I strongly approve your plan," the Russian said. "But, one thing worries me—how do you propose to get back into your own lines?"

"You can leave that to me. I've spies in Shanghai who will facilitate our return. And I appoint you, Li, to get in contact with the General Staff. For the moment, the essential thing is to separate to avoid arousing suspicions."

"What about your wife?"

"My good Leonidoff, I don't need to tell you how glad and sad I'm going to be, all at once, to take her in my arms for only a few minutes. But it is imperative that I be at headquarters to-night. I have no right to be absent when our troops are preparing to move. I rely on you to keep an eye on her because I haven't the slightest idea when next I'll be able to join her."

"Count on me—I'll see that she's all right."

"You don't hate me because I'm a Red?"

"Before everything else, we're all of us human beings whether we're Russian or Chinese, Red or White!"

The two men shook hands warmly.

Tchao had not understood the latter part of this conversation, and he was impatient to act. He was troubled as to how to rejoin the Third Red Army. He asked:

"Chief, once you have the ransom money, how are we going to get back to headquarters? Because, without papers, the railroad and the Hangchow highway will be out of the question."

"I know."

"And we don't want to get caught like skunks in a hole!"

"You've heard me mention Li Yu Chan and Wou Hio Li. They are still in Shanghai and they are attached to our Secret Police."

"Yes? And then?"

"Then? Why, those two learned men will not be long in preparing passes signed by the Minister of Communications at Nankin. We will probably be railroad inspectors. You understand?"

"Ah! That's a thought!"

"We'll take the first train even if it's loaded with Nationalists and we'll get off wherever our comrades have blocked the line."

"Good! Fine, chief!"

"But you act as if you thought I'd led you into a trap?"

"No! No, chief. I admire your foresight!"

Ho Chung playfully dug an elbow into his assistant's ribs. He was really happy. He jumped into the automobile beside Leonidoff and joked:

"You'd better admire me if you enjoy your health. Because, the day you don't, I'll cut off your ears, you old bandit!"



While Ho Chung and Leonidoff were on their way to free Paulette, the general commanding the Nationalist troops in the Kiangsu, who had established his headquarters in the neighbourhood of Shanghai, received the following telegram from Min Kong:

"Commander of Outpost signals disappearance

officer and soldier on patrol duty about four in the morning. Probably killed by four Red spies, three Chinese and one white man, who crossed river without papers in black automobile after taking bac from boatmen by force. Information just received says Chief Intelligence Service Third Red Army one of the four. Report follows."

CHAPTER X

A THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR ONE HEAD

PERFORATED-LOTUS, very much excited, entered the room and cried :

"Madame ! Madame ! Monsieur Policeman française outside for talky-talky no can wait."

"A policeman ? You're sure ?"

"Oui. Oui. Look—see quick——out window. He say know Madame vely well alleady. Look see !"

Paulette raised the curtain and immediately recognised Boulissier, one of the inspectors she had met on the *Aramis*. Reassured, she ordered :

"Yes, you're right, I know him. He's an inspector of the French police. Ask him to come up."

Boulissier appeared. Paulette was still living in the same lodgings. Her husband had gone back to the Third Red Army and she had not seen him for two months. Furthermore, he had not written her a single word.

"Madame Ho Chung," said the inspector, "forgive me if I've disturbed you, but it is most important. I had to see you alone. It is a very serious matter. And it concerns your husband."

"My husband ! Then you know where he is ?"

And, noticing the inspector's hesitation, she exclaimed :

" Oh ! *Mon Dieu !* You're not going to tell me something terrible has happened to him this time ? "

" Be calm, Madame. Nothing terrible has happened to him so far. But—but—well, I say ' so far ' because——"

" Because what ? "

" I suppose I'll have to tell you in so many words. There's a price on his head——"

" What ? I—I—I don't think I understand. You say—his head—there's a price on it ? "

" Unfortunately, yes. It's only too clear. You know as well as I do that Monsieur Ho Chung has conducted certain operations in the Nationalist lines which have greatly displeased the gentlemen at Nankin——"

" I suppose you refer to the kidnapping of Ho Ta Wen, the Elder."

" Yes. To say nothing of the ransom, or the two men drowned in the river near Min Hong one night, or the treatment to which Madame Lovely-Torture was subjected or any number of other minor details. In a word, the commander-in-chief of the Nationalist forces has informed the chief of police of the Shanghai region that Monsieur Ho Chung's head is worth exactly one thousand dollars. In one way, that's very flattering but, in another, it's extremely dangerous for him."

" But—— He has nothing to fear from the Reds ? "

" Certainly not ! As long as he's with them, he's perfectly safe."

" Well, then ? "

" But supposing he comes to Shanghai on a

secret mission? If he is recognised and captured, it's all over for him. They'll cut off his head in less than twenty-four hours. Even we, in the Concessions, have orders to arrest him and turn him over to the Chinese authorities."

"Monsieur Boulissier! This is awful!"

"Madame, I am very sorry, but I wonder if you have any idea of what's happening and of the gravity of the situation. We are obliged to aid the Nationalists every way we can. Don't forget that their troops, reinforced at the last minute by the Marshal, saved Shanghai from the Red Armies. I appreciate perfectly that they acted in their own interests and that they didn't help us to defend ourselves out of any great love for us. Because you can imagine the prestige the Bolsheviks would have acquired if they had occupied the city. That danger has been thwarted for the time being. That's understood. Blood would have been shed if the Reds had arrived. And the result is that we can't refuse our collaboration to Nankin where the authorities have determined to inflict merciless punishment on the offenders. They have drawn up a list of suspects, for the most part members of the Chinese Communist Secret Police who have been spying in the region. Several of your husband's friends have already been arrested; among others *The Learned Gentleman* and *the Mountain of Jade*. They were strangled last night."

"Strangled?"

"Yes, by the executioner. And I assure you that he made them suffer as long as he could."

"Oh!"

The inspector lowered his voice :

"Therefore, I have come to inform you in strictest confidence—I am here by the order of the French chief of police who would be miserable were he forced to perform such a cruel duty. We don't want to meet Monsieur Ho Chung, and I even less than some of my friends because I know him personally and I like him. We don't want to be obliged to arrest him or to help the Chinese police to track him down. I'm sure you understand ? "

"Yes—yes, Monsieur. And this is very kind of you, but it's—so terrible ! "

"Alas, dear Madame, we are in China ! And because we know what your feelings must be, we want to do everything in our power to avoid having a hand in this affair. Consequently, I am going to ask you, if it is possible for you to do so, to warn your husband of the grave danger he will be running if he attempts to enter Shanghai. Because it may be that he had not been informed. And he must not come here if he values his life ! Not under any circumstances ! They are watching for him, and even if we others shirked our duty, the Chinese would be sure to arrest him in short order. Because—think of it, a thousand dollars for one head ! "

"Warn him ? Warn him ? But how can I ? I have no idea where he is."

"You've had no news at all ? "

"Not since he came and saved me from that horrible woman. You know ? "

"Yes, I heard about it. With Leonidoff——"

"We were together for about an hour that day

but, since then, I haven't heard a word. He's completely disappeared and it's at least two months."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Yes. He was going to rejoin the headquarters of the Third Red Army. At that time, they were near Hangchow."

"The Red retreat, worried on two fronts, has doubtless pushed them toward the Ngan Hoei frontier. But where? Look here, I'll see if I can discover exactly where the headquarters of the Third Red Army are located at the moment. I'll come back and tell you. Have you anyone you can depend on to take your message?"

"Only Leonidoff or Perforated-Lotus."

"Send an ex-White Russian out there? No! Too dangerous—for him! But your young *amah* would get through easily enough."

"Yes! And she would ask nothing better than to be allowed to help save her master's life! He's her compatriot and she worships him! I'll send her just as soon as I hear from you. And, Monsieur Boulissier, please thank your chief for me!"

o

Autumn had come. A steady drizzle had been falling in Shanghai for two days and nights. The coolies were soaked to the skin and, even when they took shelter under their rickshas, another passenger hailed them before they could get dry. Under the drenched roofs of the sampans, the boatmen waited patiently. The streets of the Chinese city were less animated; people hurried by the shops; the tea-rooms were crowded; optimists stood in the shops and expected the sky to clear.

Despite the gloomy aspect of the city with its glistening roofs and streets, Paulette was happy. It was not because her lodgings on the second floor were particularly gay even when the sun was shining, but because she had finally learned the probable whereabouts of the headquarters of the Third Red Army. At last she knew where to find her husband. It had taken an entire week, but Boulassier had eventually obtained the precious information. General Tsang had located at Nan Tsin, behind the lake of Ta Hou, near the Kiangsu frontier.

Paulette said to Perforated-Lotus :

"Listen carefully. I can really trust you, can't I? You love your Master dearly, don't you?"

"Me love Master? Yes—oh, oui! Madame she know that—Master blother sister allee same——"

"Then, listen—I told you what the French policeman said when he was here. You remember? If Master comes to Shanghai he will be arrested and they will kill him."

"Oui—oui. Chop—chop him off head. No good! Tellible! No good police Chinoise. Much bad man!"

"Do you think you're brave enough to go to Nan Tsin? Do you know where Nan Tsin is in the province of the Kiangsu?"

"Yes—oui. Me savez vely well. Ne live vely little baby in village on way Souchow flom Shanghai."

"All right. I want you to take a letter to Master. I want to warn him at once that he must not come here and that I am well. When it is

possible, I intend to go to him in Nan Tsin. We'll go together if you like?"

"Yes. Oh, oui! All the both——"

"I'm going to give you a letter and a little money for the voyage."

"Me no need much money."

"And you'll hide the letter very carefully. And if you think there's any danger you'll destroy it. Because you know what to tell Master."

"Me know vely well——"

It was almost dark when Paulette finally sealed the envelope. She already felt greatly relieved because she could calculate that, in two days at the very latest, her husband would be acquainted with the state of affairs. Writing feverishly, she had not yet put on the light. As she stood up to turn the switch, Perforated-Lotus uttered a piercing scream which rooted her to the spot. She dared not step forward to open the door. She was terrified; terrified of the shadows, of the rainy night outside, of the silence of the courtyard. She saw the door turn very slowly on its hinges. Just as she was about to scream in her turn, Ho Chung appeared. He was wet. He was dirty. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was like a hunted beast.



Paulette threw her arms about him. He whispered:

"Be careful, my little wife—I am soaked to the skin."

"My poor darling! Where have you come from? I was just going to send. But how did

you get here and in such condition? You'll catch your death of cold!"

"Listen to me, Paulette—I am going to tell you everything. I've had nothing to eat or drink since the day before yesterday——"

"Perforated-Lotus will make you some tea—with rum——"

"No. No alcohol. Just tea and a bowl of rice."

"And you must change your clothes. We'll put those in front of the kitchen fire to dry."

Paulette and Perforated-Lotus, beside themselves with excitement, dashed here and there preparing things while he got into an old woollen dressing-gown and tried to get warm. His movements were calm enough, but there was an expression in his eyes which showed that he scented a danger which he was at a loss to define. When Perforated-Lotus brought the tea, she found him standing behind the curtains peering out into the courtyard. Paulette said:

"Dear, those are not the clothes you usually wear. Where did you get that old tunic?"

"I had to disguise myself to reach Shanghai."

Paulette dropped her voice to a whisper:

"And you don't dream of the terrible risk you're running! The French police have told me——"

"I know—I know. There's a price on my head." He laughed silently and added: "A thousand dollars!"

"But you must be mad! Do you mean to tell me that you knew it and yet you dared to——"

"I dared because I wanted to see you, my little sweetheart of the springtime."

"You shouldn't have done it! No, you shouldn't! If the Chinese police learn——"

"I am not worried, Paulette." He took her in his arms and held her tenderly. "No, not worried at all because they think I've gone to Souchow on a mission. My faithful Tchao put them off the track."

"And I was just going to send Perforated-Lotus to Nan Tsin to warn you."

"Nan Tsin? But how did you know?"

"Monsieur Boulissier, the police inspector, found out for me."

"He is a good man and a brave one."

Ho Chung drank his tea very hot in little swallows. He sat on the sofa beside Paulette, who held his left hand with the gentleness of a mother by the bedside of her child. He ate his rice. Perforated-Lotus dropped a saucepan in the kitchen. He started and quickly drew his hand away from Paulette. His nerves were shaky.

"That's nothing," Paulette told him, "the servant is there."

"Oh! I wasn't frightened. I'm exhausted, that's all. I've been a week getting here."

"A week!"

"The Army is camped around Nan Tsin, resting. I took advantage of the chance to get away. I wanted so badly to see you, my little wife."

He put down his bowl and his chopsticks and stretched out on the sofa. The light fell on his face. There were dark lines under his eyes and he looked

almost old. It had been a perilous voyage. He had left General Tsang's headquarters disguised as a vagabond provision merchant. He had known that he would encounter detachments of the Nankin armies on the way. Great prudence had been necessary. He had reached Souchow on foot and by means of the autobuses packed with peasants. He had found the owner of a sampan who had agreed to take him by the canals as far as a little station on the Souchow-Shanghai line, and there he had boarded a train. Arriving in the suburbs of the great city, his first thought had been to find safe refuge with comrades upon whom he could depend. The little house of his friends The Learned Gentleman and Mountain of Jade had appeared to be uninhabited. He had skulked around for hours waiting for them to return. At last, one of their neighbours had informed him that he was wasting his time. They had been arrested and there was rumour that they had been executed. Some said that they had been strangled. He had flaired the danger that he was running by showing himself near their house, and he had walked into the Chinese city. Like a coolie, he had pushed an old wheelbarrow full of stones. It had rained continually. Little by little, he had approached Paulette's lodgings, the end of his journey. He had kept his eyes peeled every second to be certain that he was not being followed. Near the jade market, he had thought he recognised a man who had been dogging him for some time. He had turned his wheelbarrow into a winding street, left it up against a wall and had run for it, slipping in

the mud, receiving the water from the overflowing gutters on the head. And again he had thought he recognised the same man in front of an ivory merchant's shop. He had continued his zigzag course, keeping close to the walls, bumping into the passers-by. Only in the Temple of Confucius had he paused for breath. And, to be sure to put the man off his trail, he had set off again in the direction of the Public Works' building, near the Chinese customs.

He had wandered the length of the quay of the Whangpoo. And, now, he had been certain that nobody was after him. Even if he had been recognised by a Chinese secret service man, he had definitely lost him and there had been no further cause for alarm. By that time, it had been about five in the afternoon and he had felt confident of passing in the drizzle which was like a liquid fog and of reaching the French Concession.

He had gained it by the Conty road and from there he had reached the rue Stanislas Chevalier. Nobody had been watching in the vicinity of his lodgings. His heart had pounded with joy at the expectation of seeing his wife. It had only remained to cross that wide courtyard to find himself in the warmth of his own modest home.

* * *

Ho Chung stretched out on the sofa. Paulette had covered him carefully with a blanket. The heat had done him good and that tender hand on his forehead had calmed his fever.

He had commenced to tell Paulette the details of his voyage. But his voice had grown more and

more indistinct. His eyes had closed. He had failed to finish a sentence. He had fallen into a deep sleep, overcome with fatigue.

Perforated-Lotus opened the door and bumped against a chair. Paulette whispered :

“ Sssh ! Be quiet ! Master is asleep ! ”

The servant tiptoed out and left Paulette sitting by his side. She listened to his regular breathing. Outside in the night, the rain was still coming down, monotonous, depressing.

CHAPTER XI

ALL WHITE—ALL WHITE

AFTER a night of passion, Paulette and Ho Chung awoke in their narrow little bed. Perforated-Lotus brought the tea and drew back the curtains.

The rain-clouds had disappeared; the sky was blue, blue like lazulite. It was the pure sky of an autumn day, relaxed and serene. All nature seemed to be dreaming with melancholy of the splendours which had gone with the summer.

Paulette got up and slipped into a simple Chinese dress of pink for which she had a special affection. She had no more than stepped into the adjoining room than Perforated-Lotus drew near the bed, clasped her hands and doing her best to hide her fears, said in a low voice :

" Master—I went out early this morning to the market. There were two men waiting at the entrance to the courtyard. Two men I have never seen before. They came up to me and asked if my Master was in Shanghai. I told them that we had not even heard from you for two moons. They said nothing and they let me go. But, when I came back an hour later, they were still there. They were talking with two other Chinese who looked at me as I went by. I hid myself behind the shed where we do the washing—I saw them separate.

Two of them remained at the entrance of the courtyard and the other two went down the alley to watch the other exit. Master—I am frightened. Not for me, but for you—because I'm sure they're policemen."

Ho Chung had listened without manifesting the least alarm or surprise. He sat up in bed. He contemplated Perforated-Lotus for a moment and then he motioned to her to come even closer to the bed. In an almost inaudible whisper, he told her :

"Listen carefully, little sister. You must not speak to a living soul of what you saw this morning. I mean—not even to your mistress. She must not know of this—until the end! Because you are right—those men are policemen and they have learned of my return. To-morrow, I shall be in the hands of the executioner. To-morrow night, I shall be dead."

Perforated-Lotus shuddered. But Ho Chung's right hand commanded silence as he went on :

"Understand me well, little sister. This last day must not be a sad one for your mistress. Because to-night she will have time enough to suffer. And so, be gay. You know nothing—you suspect nothing. You are worried about nothing. You must be gay! I order you to be gay! Very gay! Until it's all over. No, don't make a sound! Here comes your mistress——"

Paulette stood there. Ho Chung explained in the most casual way :

"I was just asking Perforated-Lotus what she intended to give us for lunch. It seems we're going to have pork, bean cheese, fresh vermicelli and

bamboo shoots. And, for you Paulette, there is going to be some pastry from the Franco-Russian shop on the rue Vallon. What a feast, my little wife! Would you mind if we stayed at home to-day? Really, I don't feel a bit like going out."

"Dear! Of course we're not going out! In the first place, it would be madness on your part to show yourself in the city. You told me last night that you could remain with me for five whole days and nights. And I forbid you to budge from here during that time!"

"I will obey you, Paulette. I promise not to leave the house. But, really, you're making an awful fuss about nothing at all——"

"Fuss! After what——"

"Oh, I know. They were after me last month. But they've forgotten me by this time because I haven't been seen in Shanghai and they have other game to stalk."

"If only that were true! And you're absolutely certain that you weren't followed when you crossed the city?"

"Absolutely! You can forget that the police ever existed, my little wife."

* * *

They lunched like lovers, *tête à tête*. Paulette, comforted by her husband's words, had chased her fears away. She abandoned herself to a joy which was real. Ho Chung was so happy, so like a school-boy on a holiday, that she could not help but copy him.

As they divided the pastry which Perforated-Lotus had chosen, he informed her of the latest

developments. Although he had been with the Third Red Army all this time, his agents had kept him acquainted with details which were unknown even in the Chinese quarter of Shanghai. For instance, Madame Lovely-Torture had lost her mind. Ho Ta Wen, the Elder, had gone with her to the ancestor's home in Hangchow, where vain efforts were being made to give her back her faculties. The brave Leonidoff had found a post as night watchman in an important bank on Nankin Road.

"And what has happened to the family house?" Paulette was anxious to know.

"It's vacant for the time being. The whole family has gone into retirement with the ancestor. Only our young and delightful friend Hsu is missing."

"But what's become of him?"

"He completed his eventful career in the Whangpoo with a lump of lead attached to his feet. Teng Fah is true a prophet and he foresaw that if Hsu played a double game he would lose his appetite for rice. Hsu eats no more."

And now Ho Chung's voice grew grave. He said:

"Yes, Paulette, we still hope to win. We have met with temporary reverses, but they cannot stop us from struggling for our ideal. Our Cause is just. We are fighting for a bigger and better China. And the man who dies for our Cause is fortunate. Men come, men go, but our columns continue on their way to victory!"

Paulette took both his hands in hers and pleaded:

"But you, dear! You! I don't want you to

go on risking your life for a Cause, no matter how just it is."

Ho Chung only closed his eyes. He made no reply. Paulette insisted:

"Do you promise that you won't? That you'll be careful? And that you won't come here again? It is too dangerous! In spite of all you've said, I'm not really convinced. Listen to me, dear, I beg you not to come here again. The next time I will go to you. And Perforated-Lotus will go with me. We will travel together!"

Ho Chung's eyes remained closed, but his lips moved to say:

"Yes—you will travel together——"

His voice might have come from another world.

* * *

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Paulette went out to make a few purchases in the neighbouring shops. As soon as he was alone, Ho Chung sneaked out of their lodgings and tiptoed up to the third floor. At the end of the hall, there was a window which surveyed the courtyard, the adjacent alley and the vacant property beyond it. He immediately perceived the four men described by Perforated-Lotus. They were still guarding the two exits. He also remarked two more men who, loitering in the alley, no doubt belonged to the Chinese secret police. Ho Chung saw that he was trapped this time and that escape was out of the question. He realised that his fate was sealed and that, to-morrow, he would be turned over, without trial, to the executioner.

He returned to the lodgings and found the clothes

he had changed on his arrival. He took the scissors and split the lining of the worn tunic. He removed from it a tiny box which had almost been destroyed by the rain and the dampness. He opened it with great care. It contained a grey powder which he poured into a cup. He ordered Perforated-Lotus to bring him some tea. He filled his cup, covered it with the saucer according to the custom and waited.

A quarter of an hour later, Paulette came back. She was pale. Her husband asked her if she was ill. In a voice strangled with emotion, she told him :

"I met Boulissier in the rue Stanislas Chevalier. He was just coming out of the offices of the French Secret Police. Oh, dear ! I thought I was going to faint on the sidewalk. He said to me exactly this : ' You did well to warn your husband in Nan Tsin because all the inspectors of the Chinese police are after him. The rumour is that he has been seen in Shanghai. Personally, I don't believe a word of it. But, as they've asked for our assistance at the first alarm, we have been instructed to be on the look-out for Monsieur Ho Chung ! I pray to God he won't be foolhardy enough to come to Shanghai ! ' Those were his very words, dear. Oh ! I'm still trembling——"

Ho Chung was like a father as he comforted her. He laughed :

"My little wife ! You must not alarm yourself for nothing ! Here I am, safe and sound. They may be looking for me but they haven't found me."

"Listen to me, dear. It breaks my heart to see you go, but—I beg you—profit by this night to disappear. It is too dangerous for you to remain in Shanghai!"

"Well—if you wish it—I'll disappear in a little while—I promise you that, my beloved. But it is still light. I will go with the coming of night. We still have an hour. Let's drink some tea and be happy while we can."

Ho Chung's wonderful calm made a great impression on Paulette. So great was his psychic force and his power of suggestion that, once again, she almost forgot her fears. Because, was it not true that, so far, nothing awful had happened? She felt that her husband could perform miracles. No matter how fine the net his enemies had drawn about him, he could always slip through it.

When she moved to refill his cup, he said:

"Thank you, little wife, but I still have some."

And, with a steady hand, he lifted his cup to his lips in unison with Paulette.

"When I think," she exclaimed with a laugh, "that you have taught me to really enjoy this green tea!"

"But, my little wife, that is not astonishing for have I not taught you many other things?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Tell me what I have taught you."

"Well? First, you taught me to love. You are so kind, so gentle, so wonderful to me. You, who can be so cruel to others!"

"Do not the claws of the tigress destroy the prey

and still caress the little ones? But, what else have you learned from me?"

"To eat with chopsticks!"

"Do you wish you hadn't?"

"Dearest! I don't regret a single hour we have spent together since we left France. Not even the tragic ones."

"No more do I, my little wife. But, tell me—haven't I taught you anything else?"

"Hmm? Oh, yes! To love poetry!"

A tired smile broke the firm line of Ho Chung's mouth. He leaned forward and murmured:

"Paulette, it makes me very happy to hear those words from your lips. Yes, we should all love poetry because it is as beautiful as the lotus flower gazing at itself in the mirror of a pond beneath the May moon. You make me very happy, my beloved little wife, when you tell me that I have helped you to love poetry. Listen. The night has not yet come—I still have time to compose something for you—before I go."

"Dearest! Please don't say that word."

"Go? But you know I must go. You told me yourself— And I won't be so sad if I make a few verses before I go. Give me the ink—and my old bowl of brushes. Thank you, my little wife. I am going to lie down on the bed—I—I feel a little tired. And the white paper. Thank you, Paulette. And now, come and sit beside me—very close to me."

There was still light in the room. All was silent in the house. Paulette sat beside her husband. She made a pillow for him with her arm. He was

pensive for a time. Then, very deliberately, he designed some characters which meant nothing to Paulette, but which fascinated her by the beauty of their form.

Suddenly, he shook from head to foot. She put her arm about his shoulders and asked :

"Are you cold, dear?"

"No. That was nothing, my little wife. You see, the memories I'm seeking to evoke affect me strangely. It is odd—I can picture you in Paris—it is an evening in June, perfumed by the flowers. We are strolling in the Luxembourg Gardens. You were not yet mine—but I knew, even then, that, if I touched you, you would tremble—not with fear——"

"What sweet memories——"

"Paulette—tell me that you have no regrets——"

"I—— Regret! Never!"

"Forgive me if, in China, I have failed to give you an agreeable life. But Fate has been cruel for us."

"But, dear, we have shared the darkest hours. Misfortune is not so terrible when there are two to endure it."

Ho Chung sat up a little to go on with his poem. Paulette continued to cuddle him as if he had been a child. She whispered :

"Tell me the meaning of those complicated signs—I want to know. You always imagine such marvellous things."

He made an effort to translate for her. He said :

"It's difficult, you know. Let me see—— Well, this will give you the idea :

*" In the great city
Where happiness passes
We seek it. We call.
It escapes.*

*" In the great city
Where misfortune comes
We flee it. We hide.
It finds us——"*

"But, Paulette, let me go on."

Very gently, she ran her hand over his neck. She felt that he was burning as with a fever. In her alarm, she exclaimed :

"How hot you are, dear! You're sure you're not ill?"

"No—— Really—— I feel a little tired, but it's nothing."

Once again, his whole body shook, and Paulette insisted :

"But you are ill! You're shivering terribly! Can't you take something for it?"

"No—it wouldn't do any good. It won't last. But wait—wait! Let me go on——" He considered what he had composed, shook his head, crossed it all out and muttered : "That's not good—not a bit good——"

Once more the complicated characters appeared at the end of the brush which he kept dipping in the ink. He explained to Paulette :

" This is what I'm writing now :

*" Two white herons
Pass in the sky
They make a straight line
Like two swift arrows.*

*The male flies ahead
And the female follows
When the storm scolds in the East
And the horizon grows dark.*

*The male looks around
And says to the female
Don't follow me, go back—
Back to the Occident !*

*You come from the West
Where the sky is calm and peace reigns
Beneath your pure sun, you will remember
The black clouds which have swallowed me up."*

" Paulette, I want you always to keep this little poem. I—want to finish it—before the night comes—for you alone. I must finish it. The shadows are falling. Can you still see clearly ? "

Ho Chung's voice was strange, changing little by little. Paulette looked at him very closely. She felt his hands and found them like ice.

" But, dear, you're cold ! Look at me. What is the matter ? I am sure you're not yourself. That rain yesterday——"

He made a supreme effort to grip his brush.

Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. Suddenly, the brush fell on his knees. His head dropped with all its weight on to Paulette's arm. He spoke with difficulty :

" I don't believe I'll be able to finish it—— But I've explained the thought—— My little sweetheart of the springtime, stay where you are—don't fly away to the West. Follow me a little further—the clouds are so dark—so black——"

" Oh, my dearest ! You're on fire with fever. Let me go and get you some——"

" No—— Don't get anything—my little sweet wife. Stay here with me—— You remember—our first night in Shanghai—you were afraid—you hid yourself in my arms. This—this is my last night in Shanghai—I am not afraid—— But I want to feel your arms. Don't say anything—— Yes, it's the fever—I must rest before I go—so far away ! I held your hand the same way that evening—on the bench—near the Luxembourg—you were my happiness, my little golden springtime——"

He squeezed Paulette's wrists and his voice was harsh, but he went on :

" Listen to me—if I don't wake up, I would like it—I would be happy if you—if you dressed all in white—you know. You have a pretty white dress. It came from—from the West—— Put it on—so that I can be content—— We—we dress that way—when death comes into the house."

Paulette listened. She was certain that he was delirious, but she had no idea that it was a fatal

illness. She pulled the blanket over him and held him tight in her arms. She whispered :

"Yes—yes—my dearest—I will do as you wish. And, when you are well again, you will look at me and you will laugh at yourself for having had such sad thoughts."

Ho Chung's head was nestled on Paulette's breast. His eyes were almost closed and his voice was almost lost as he murmured :

"A thousand dollars for my head— Two herons pass in the sky— The male is in front— his wife follows him—in white— My little sweetheart of the springtime—will be—all white—all—white—"



Night had fallen. The Chinese secret service men had broken into the lodgings. They had terrorised Perforated-Lotus. They had gone away, furious in their disappointment. Their prey had escaped the executioner.

Night had fallen. In that poor little silent room, a servant girl lamented while a woman in a white dress, beside herself with grief, knelt by the bed and prayed. On the table, the lamp-light fell on the beautiful characters of a poem without an end.

THE END